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Adventure

Gordon Young
Konrad Bercovici
Frederick R. Bechdolt
W. Townend
Jesse D. Wharton
Harold Lamb
W. C. Tuttle
Captain Dingle
Rafael Sabatini
E. M. Vace

MERLIN PEARSON

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Headings . . . . . **August Kaiser**

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IN THE "jungle" by the side of the railroad track the *Frisco Kid* and *Gay-Cat* come upon the push—*Crybaby Kid, Portugee Kid* and the rest—and begin their adventures with *Frisco Red*, and *Strong Arm* the Wobbly, and the lady who was the road-kids' friend. "CHILDREN OF THE ROAD," by Patrick and Terence Casey, is a novel complete in our next issue.

THE rusty rifles of men who have disappeared stand in the corner of the queer tree-house of the woman who swam like a dolphin. *Lourenço* and *Pedro*, in the Brazilian wild, find where they went—and how. "THE BOUTO," by Arthur O. Friel, is a complete novelette in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are listed on the last page of this one.

Adventure

JULY 3, 1921
VOL. XXX
N. 1.

SUN-DOG TRAILS

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE by W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Hashknife—Philanthropist," "The Devil's Dooryard," etc.

AN OBSERVER might have said that it was cruelty to animals to drive a team at high speed over such roads. Perhaps the two men, sitting on the seat of the swaying lumber-wagon, might have replied that it was cruelty to human beings for a team to act in that hurried manner. There was no question but what the team of pinto horses had taken the matter into their own hands—or rather feet—and the two men had nothing to say about it.

The equipage swept around the curving grade, skidding and bouncing, while the two men clung to the sides of the seat, staring straight ahead.

Suddenly they whirled around another curve, the wheels of the lumber-wagon spinning dangerously near to the outer end of the grade, and just ahead of them, blocking the road, stood a stage-coach and four horses, headed in the same direction as the runaway. The sharpness of the curve and a strong wind blowing down the cañon had effectively masked the approach of the runaway, and there was no time for either man to jump nor for any of the people at the stage to get out of the road.

At the side of the coach stood a woman. Just beyond her stood a masked man, rifle in hand. The driver was humped on his seat, lines held between his knees, while another masked man stood on the hub of a front wheel tugging at a heavy iron box which was partly wedged under the seat. The two men saw all this in a flash, and then the runaway team crashed into the rear of the stage.

The force of the impact drove the tongue of the wagon into the flimsy body of the stage, whirling it half-around and turning it off the grade; the four horses rearing and plunging as they whirled off the road and went down the sharp embankment.

The pinto team was flung sidewise, jack-knifing with the stage; the wagon, going sidewise, caught in the deep rut and turned completely over, following the wrecked stage off the grade.

The two men were thrown from the wagon-seat; one of them turning a complete somersault and landing on his hands and

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knees against the upper bank, while the other sprawled in the road, turned over several times and finally stopped in a sitting position with his legs dangling over the edge of the grade.

The one at the side of the bank blinked his eyes several times and then ran his hand through his mop of brick-red hair. Then he got painfully to his feet, walked to the edge of the grade and looked around.

The other, a giant of a man at least six feet six inches tall, with a long, crooked nose and a wide, humorous mouth, retained his position, except that he took a red-silk handkerchief from his hip pocket and blew his nose violently. Then he said—

"Brick, old Lafe is goin' to be real put out about them there pintos and that wagon, y'betcha."

The red-head nodded sadly. Then he turned and spat out some sand.

There was nothing heroic-looking about "Brick" Davidson. His hair was the color of new-baked bricks, and his thin, sensitive nose was plentifully besprinkled with freckles. His eyes were very blue and very ready to search out the humorous things in life. He looked below medium size, comparing him to the bulk of "Silent" Slade, but Brick was not a small man.

He spat out some more sand and looked at Silent.

"Whatcha drop them lines for?"

"You argued with me, didn't yuh?"

The big man's tone was querulous.

"Yuh always argue with me, Brick Davidson, and you know danged well I've gotta gesture."

"Gesture!"

Brick Davidson spat again contemptuously.

"Gotta, eh? Why didn't yuh go to a school where they teaches yuh to talk with your mouth? Write me a note next time, Silent. Floppin' your arms like a he-buzzard gittin' ready to fly don't convey no thoughts to my mind."

Silent Slade got slowly to his feet and peered down the hill. The stage had stopped in a clump of jack-pines, and the four stage horses, almost stripped of harness, had tangled with the limbs of a fallen pine.

One of the pintos stood near the wrecked wagon, front feet tangled in lines and neck-yoke, kicking viciously at a dangling tug. The other pinto was unfortunately past kicking at tugs, unless ghost horses wear harness.

"Brick!" exclaimed Silent. "Brick, I didn't see much before the ca-tas-trophy, but somehow I gets the fool idea that there was a woman beside the stage."

"Whatcha tryin' to do-o-o! Whatcha tryin' to do-o-o!"

A long, lean face—a face that was scratched and dirty, with a long lock of grizzled hair sticking straight up like an interrogation point, suddenly appeared from behind a mesquite-bush at the edge of the grade as its owner scrambled slowly back to the road level.

He stared at Brick and Silent, and his jaws worked spasmodically as if trying to loosen something distasteful to his palate.

"It was thisaway, Limpy," began Silent.

"I'd rather hear Davidson tell it," interrupted Limpy Squires, the stage-driver. "You kinda alibi yourself before yuh tell anythin'."

"There was a woman—" began Silent.

Limpy turned and looked down toward the wrecked stage; then back at Silent and Brick, masticating furiously. Brick's toe described a circle in the dust as he averted his glance from the old stage-driver.

Limpy looked back down the hill and Brick stooped swiftly and picked something off the ground. His sudden motion caused the others to turn, but they only saw Brick's hand coming away from his hip pocket, dangling a package of smoking-tobacco.

"Yuh ain't mentioned the hold-up," remarked Brick. "Have yuh forgot it, Limpy?"

Limpy scratched his tousled head, while his tongue explored the interior of his mouth. Then he nodded.

"You fellers sure busted up a regular party. I wonder——"

Limpy slid down the bank toward the stage, and Brick and Silent followed him.

Limpy led the way into the thicket and climbed up on one of the front wheels. He peered under the seat, then got down and limped around to the other side, where an iron box was lying upside down.

"They never got it," grinned Limpy, patting the box with his toe.

"What's in it?"

Brick knelt down and looked at it closely.

"I dunno. Sent out by the Whippoorwill mine. Danged thing must weigh about a hundred pounds."

"Who was the woman?" asked Brick.

Limpy rubbed his hands on his hips and squinted at Brick.

"I ain't in the habit of asking passengers for their names. She didn't do no talkin', and she wore a veil."

"Reckon them there robbers kidnaped her?"

This from Silent.

"Kidnaped, ——!" grunted Limpy. "She wasn't no kid. We'll have to take this here box——"

"Yuh needn't worry about the box," said a voice behind them; and they turned to look into the muzzle of a rifle, backed up by a masked man.

THE mask was of black material with two eye-holes, and it covered him from the crown of his hat to below his shoulders.

The three instinctively put up their hands, and just then the bushes parted and out stepped another masked man and a masked woman. The woman's dress was badly torn, and there was a smear of blood across her wrist. In her right hand she carried a heavy pistol, while the man carried a rifle. At a nod from the first man the woman took the rifle and leveled it at the group, while one of the men appropriated the pistols from Brick, Silent and Limpy.

Then the two men picked up the iron box and carried it down the hill out of sight, while the woman still covered the three men. She made no motion to follow her companions. Brick shifted his weight to his right leg and grinned at her.

"Yuh don't need to point that at me, sister. It wasn't my little iron box."

"Nor mine," added Limpy. "Under the circumstances, I don't even know what box yuh refers to."

But the woman refused to speak.

"Never knowed it could be possible," drawled Silent. "It ain't noways reasonable to suppose that a woman can keep from talkin' thataway. No offense, ma'am; but are yuh married?"

The woman seemed to be laughing under her mask, but did not reply.

"'Cause," Silent pointed out, "'cause if yuh ain't— No, I want to see your face before I goes further in these here ne-go-ti-ations. Your disposition suits me to a gnat's eyelash, but I'm kinda finicky about faces."

From down in the timber came a shrill whistle, and the woman turned and started away, turning her back on the three men. She disappeared into the brush.

"Well," said Brick, "you fellers might as well take your hands down."

Silent grinned and lowered his hands. Limpy rubbed his hands together and masticated viciously, staring at the others. Silent started for the spot where the woman had entered the brush, but a bullet flupped past his head and thudded into the body of the coach. From down in the ravine came the *whang* of a rifle.

"No." Silent shook his head. "No, I reckon I won't try to make a mash on her while she's got a chapey-rone like that."

"Held up by a woman," chuckled Brick. "Sufferin' sunfish! Next thing yuh know they'll be drivin' stages and——"

"Go ahead and laugh!" rasped Limpy. "Your hands went as high as mine did."

"Higher," admitted Brick. "I'm taller than you, Limpy. Let's each take a horse and go to Marlin City. Mebbe the sheriff would like to hear about it."

"Whatsa use?" argued Silent. "'Bunty' Blair'd never catch any road-agents."

"He's a elegant sheriff," nodded Limpy. "Swell-elegant."

"You helped elect him," accused Silent.

"I didn't!" snapped Limpy. "I voted for Brick."

Brick stopped half-way up the sloping side of the grade and laughed.

"If yuh did, Limpy, there was crooked work at the polls. I only got seven votes. Silent, 'Baldy' McPherson, Sam Clayton, Bill See, Lafe Freeman, 'Happy' Sinclair and me. Them six was campaignin' for me, and I know I voted for myself."

Limpy masticated violently. The evidence seemed against him.

"I kinda thought yuh had a good chance, Brick," he stated, ignoring Brick's implication. "Happy told me that yuh had three hundred votes pledged."

"I did. Election showed me one thing, Limpy."

"What?"

"That there's three hundred —— liars in Sun-Dog County."

Limpy scratched his nose reflectively and nodded.

"More'n that, Brick—seven more; only you wasn't in no position to discover the other seven."

Brick laughed. Brick was always ready to laugh, even if the joke was on him, and

the recent election had surely been a joke—as far as Brick was concerned.

It was the first time that there had been a split in the Democrat and Republican vote in Sun-Dog. Bunty Blair, the fortunate candidate, had won over Zell Mohr by six votes.

There was no question but that the Nine Bar Nine outfit and supporters could have swung the election to Mohr, but there was little choice between Blair and Mohr. Bunty owned a small horse outfit a few miles from Marlin City, while Mohr owned a big saloon in Silverton, sixteen miles west.

Mohr was a burly, silent man, swarthy as a Mexican, but his nerve had never been questioned. Bunty, on the other hand, was slight of physique, prone to alibi himself out of all trouble—and to keep out. Limpy's expression, "swell-elegant," covered Bunty better than any description.

Men agreed that Brick Davidson might make a good sheriff—but Lafe Freeman, owner of the Nine Bar Nine, announced openly in the Dollar Down Saloon the night before election:

"No, Brick won't git elected, and I'll tell yuh why. He knows too much for the size of the jail. He'd have to build a bull-pen to hold the overflow. With Bunty Blair or Zell Mohr on the job we could tear down the jail and they wouldn't miss it durin' their term."

Zell Mohr heard this statement but made no reply. Lafe Freeman knew that Mohr was there, and Mohr knew that Lafe said it for his benefit Lafe had notches in his old single-action Colt, and Marlin City knew how he got them. Therefore, Zell Mohr feigned not to have heard the statement.

THE sheriff's office interior proved that Bunty Blair was "swell-elegant." The ages-old reward posters had been torn from the walls and in their place hung works of art. The subjects of these framed ornaments were not at all decorous, but they pleased the eyes of Bunty and his deputy, "Three Star" Hennessey, who affected red vests and perfume.

Three Star was ornamental, but very unpractical. His classic features were marred by an old knife-scar which circled one of his cheeks, and his nose had come in contact with a heavy object at some past date which had moved it out of a straight line; but Three Star had decorative ideas as to raiment, which seemed to satisfy Bunty Blair's conception of what a deputy sheriff should wear.

Easy-chairs had replaced the old whittled relics, and there was little left to suggest a sheriff's office except the weather-beaten sign over the door. The county paid the sheriff the munificent sum of a hundred dollars per month, which was far too small a sum considering the danger connected with wearing a star in Sun-Dog County. Sun-Dog was fortunate in being able to dispose of the office.

The voters seemed willing to follow the lines of least resistance, and to elect a sheriff that would do likewise.

Just now Bunty and Three Star were sitting in the office. Bunty lolled back in a chair, his feet on the table, half-asleep, while Three Star's long nose delved deep into the pages of an ancient magazine.

Sitting in the doorway, back against one side and feet braced against the other, was "Harp" Harris, one of Bunty's hired men. Harp was of peculiar physique. His shoulders were narrow—so narrow, in fact, that when he stood upright one noticed that it was a straight line from the point of his shoulder to hip, and thence down his long leg to a pair of big feet. A pair of bat-ears extended well out from his head, completing the straight line from head to heels. His face was habitually sad; caused, no doubt, by the mental effort of trying to remember certain tunes. Just now Harp's two big hands were cupped around his mouth, from which came the doleful twanging of a jew's-harp. While other cowpunchers soothed their nerves with cigarets, Harp relaxed over the vibrating little instrument.

Suddenly he wiped his lips with the back of his hand and stared up the street.

"Somethin'," stated Harp, turning to Three Star, "somethin' has come to pass."

Up to the hitch-rack came Brick, Silent and Limpy, all mounted on harnessed horses and leading two more. They tied the horses to the rack and then came over to the office door. Bunty and Three Star came to the door. Limpy masticated violently, scratched his nose and looked up at Bunty.

"Held up."

Bunty craned his neck for a look at the horses.

"Did they steal your stage?" asked Harp.

Limpy ignored this pleasantry.

"Get anything?" asked Bunty.

"Somethin'," nodded Limpy.

"One man?" inquired Three Star.

"Two men."

"Oh!" grunted Bunty.

"Was yuh expectin' more?" asked Brick.

"Where?" Bunty ignored Brick.

"Whisperin' Crick grade. Know where them two curves is? It was the one this side. There's a lot of brush——"

"I know the place. Where's the stage?"

"Ditched."

"Anybody hurt?"

"There was a female—" began Limpy, but caught a look from Brick and stopped.

"Was she hurt?"

"Not so awful danged bad," said Brick.

"I'll ask Limpy to do the talking," stated Bunty. "Where is the woman?"

"I dunno," grunted Limpy.

Bunty stared at Limpy and then at Silent and Brick, who were grinning.

"This is the ——est conversation I ever heard!" snapped Bunty, and then turned to Harp. "Go hitch up my horse."

"Ain'tcha goin' to take a posse?" asked Silent. "Yuh sure ain't goin' huntin' road-agents with a top-buggy."

"Since when did you start running my office, Slade?"

Harp went around behind the building, and Bunty and Three Star went back into the office, leaving Silent, Brick and Limpy looking at one another.

"This country is goin' to the dogs," declared Limpy.

"Mark an X in front of their name instead of tyin' a can on their tail—what do yuh expect?" demanded Brick.

Limpy turned back to the horses, unhooked the mail-sack from over a hame and limped up the street toward the post-office. Brick and Silent grinned and crossed the street.

"What did yuh find down there in the road, Brick?"

Brick looked sharply at Silent, but Silent's expression showed that he was not merely guessing that Brick had picked up something at the scene of the hold-up. They were at the door of the Dollar Down, and Brick shook his head warningly and they went inside.

It was too early in the day for much animation in King Cleeve's place. Several men were lolling around the place. A gambler sat at a table, idly turning cards from a dealing-box. Over at the piano a dance-hall girl was trying to pick out a tune with one finger, and grimacing with the effort of picking out the right key.

The bartender slid a bottle down the bar and reached for glasses.

"Where's Cleeve?" asked Brick.

"Huntin'."

The bartender grinned as if it were a joke.

"Huntin' what?"

"Coyotes. Zell Mohr brought his three greyhounds from Silverton, and him and King went huntin'. Reckon the're goin' to run 'em down. They've been talking about it for quite a while."

"Sun-Dog County sure is giftin' civilized," nodded Brick. "Women holdin' up stages, sheriff huntin' outlaws in a top-buggy and gamblers ridin' to hounds."

"Which all happens when?"

The bartender was interested.

"Today. The stage was held up a while ago."

"Women do it?"

"Woman," corrected Brick.

The bartender turned away to serve a customer.

"'S —— funny that nobody gits excited," complained Silent, and then whispered, "What did yuh find, Brick?"

Brick drank and turned away from the bar. Silent shook his head and followed Brick outside. Harp Harris was leaning against a post in front of the Boston Café, twanging dolefully on his jew's-harp, while from Le Blanc's blacksmith shop came the not unmusical clanging of steel against steel.

"This here place," declared Silent; "this here place needs a Sunday-school to wake her up. Let's go and eat."

They crossed the street and stopped at the edge of the sidewalk, where Brick pointed his nose toward the sky and gave a soft imitation of a coyote howl. Harp grinned and wiped the back of his long hand across his lips.

"Bunty and Three Star went buggy-ridin'," he stated.

"Gosh!"

Silent appeard shocked.

"Did they go armed?"

Harp grinned and shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"I'd hate to tell for fear it might leak out."

"Sure," grinned Brick. "Bein' as you're Bunty's hired——"

"Period," grunted Harp. "I ain't with him no more."

"When did yuh quit?"

"Thank yuh, Brick, but I didn't quit."

"What did he fire yuh for, Harp?"

"Well—" Harp licked his lips thoughtfully—"well, I told him to be sure and lock up the jail 'cause somebody might steal the hinges off the cell doors."

Brick grinned.

"Want to work for the Nine Bar Nine?"

"Gotta work," observed Harp.

"You're hired. Come and eat with us, hired man."

Harp asked nothing about the robbery, and they ate silently.

Their meal over, they sauntered outside just as a roan team, hauling a buckboard, was driven up in front of the restaurant by Lafe Freeman.

"Brick, what happened to the team and wagon?" he rasped.

"Ran away. Silent accident'ly dropped the lines."

"Did, eh?"

Freeman glared at Silent.

"Accidental, eh? Pinto dead and that Schuttler wagon all busted to ——!"

Lafe shifted his eyes to Brick.

"You're fired. Do yuh hear that? Both of yuh fired."

Brick nodded sadly and turned to Harp, who was starting to put the jew's-harp between his lips.

"I've gotta cancel that job, Harp."

"Thanks," grunted Harp, "I'd hate to work for a man who was that mean."

Lafe Freeman started to kick off the brake, but changed his mind.

"Met the sheriff and his ornyment down there," motioning down the road. "Said there was a hold-up."

"Yeah," nodded Brick. "Yeah, there was, Lafe."

Freeman held the lines between his knees while he filled his old pipe. He smiled down at the pipe and turned to Brick.

"Whatcha say, Brick?"

"I didn't say," drawled Brick, "but I was jist thinkin' about hittin' yuh for a job."

"Say yuh was?"

Lafe's tone was indignantly sarcastic.

"Huh! Yuh was, was yuh?"

He shifted his eyes to Silent and Harp and back to Brick.

"S'pose yuh want a job as foreman, eh? Yuh do? Then you'll go and hire Silent Slade and that danged harp-twanger over there. My gosh, don'tcha know wagons cost money? Don'tcha know that there pinto horse was worth——"

"Sure, sure," nodded Brick, "I knowed we'd git fired. Silent says to me—

"'Brick, my heart bleeds for Lafe, but——'"

"Don't lie!" snapped Lafe. "You've done enough without that. C'mere and tell me about that hold-up, will yuh?"

"A female!" gasped Lafe, as Brick described the hold-up. "Female? I tell yuh it's gittin' so we can't trust our weak sex. "Held a Winchester right on the three of yuh. Whatcha know about that? Petticoats and perfumed sheriffs. Next thing yuh know we'll have to do the crow-shayin'."

"Here comes Limpy," stated Silent. "Been down to the telegraph office."

Limpy was hurrying as fast as his game leg would permit and working his jaws overtime. He shuffled to a stop beside the buckboard and spat copiously.

"Sent a message to Teton," he volunteered. "They'll send it to the Whippoorwill."

"What do yuh reckon was in that box, Limpy?" asked Brick.

"We-e-ell—" Limpy squinted up the street—"well, the Whippoorwill's a free-gold producer, and they ain't shipped in a long time. That box weighed about a hundred pounds, and folks don't generally ship junk, do they?"

"Hundred pounds of gold!" gasped Lafe. "Thirty thousand dollars or thereabouts! —— fools ought to lose it when they send it without protection. Thought they was smart, didn't they? Nobody expects a unguarded stage to haul money. Don't believe in it myself, y'betcha. Goin' to the ranch, Brick?"

"Not now. Me and Silent can borry a couple of broncs from Wesson. You've got a outfit, ain't yuh, Harp? Harp's workin' for us now, Lafe."

"Work ——!" Lafe exploded. "Never had a puncher yet that would work. All right, all right. Come out and visit us, Harp. Forty a month for visitin' punchers. I'm goin' to fasten that heatin'-stove on the back of this buckboard. Ought to 'a' done that instead of sendin' a couple of

danged fools and a pinto team after it. Giddap."

Limpy turned and went down the street. Harp yawned and opined that he would buck the wheel for a while, being as he had a new job and didn't have any use for the last money that Bunty would ever pay him.

Brick and Silent sat down in the shade of a building. Silent watched Brick roll and shape a cigaret, and then he said:

"Yuh might tell me what it was. I say, yuh might, but the —— only knows if yuh will or not."

Brick lighted his cigaret and pinched out the lighted match before grinding it under his heel. Then he reached into his hip pocket and took out a soiled envelope, which he held in his cupped hands. There was just a name on it:

SCOTT MARTIN.

It had been opened. Brick slowly drew out the slip of paper, and he and Silent read the penciled note.

Tuesday, I think. J will be on stage and will signal at first curve. If no signal, let go. If there, J will go to Marlin, unless trouble. Can take care of self. This is big. Meet you in same place.

(*Signed*) O.

Brick and Silent looked at each other for a moment and then down at the note. Brick folded it up and replaced it in his pocket.

"Know who Scott Martin is?" asked Silent.

Brick nodded and puffed on his cigaret.

"Bought out the old Weepin' Tree ranch. Tall, freckled *hombre*, about fifty years old. Ties his gun down."

"Rides a blaze-faced bay," added Silent. "I've seen him. Kinda puts the deadwood on him, Brick. Gee cripes, a man's a sucker to take chances on losin' that kind of a note."

"Fools ain't all dead," grinned Brick. "In fact, I reckon, they're right in their prime."

"Whatcha goin' to do about it?"

Silent was getting anxious.

"Wait for the reward."

"Here comes Sun-Dog's swell-elegant sheriff, Brick."

Brick and Silent strolled down and watched Bunty and his deputy get out of their buggy.

"Well, I see yuh got back safe," observed Brick.

Three Star grunted, but Bunty ignored them.

"Did yuh find any tracks in the dust?" inquired Brick, insinuating that the officers did not get far from their buggy.

"I'd hate to have 'em follerin' me in the snow," stated Silent. "Betcha they'd make me go some. Did yuh find the woman?"

"You're loco," declared Three Star. "Women don't hold up stages."

"Silent, me and you can't lie a-tall—not and get away with it."

Brick grew very despondent.

"Other fellers can lie and make anybody believe——"

"Wait a minute!" snapped the exasperated sheriff. "You two talk too much and say nothin'."

"What can yuh expect?" wailed Silent. "They took our guns and we've got all excited. Nobody can talk sense when they're excited."

"Can you describe the robbers?" asked Bunty.

"Sure."

Brick stepped in close to Bunty and grew very accurate in his description.

"Medium size; mebbe a little taller. Both wore overalls, shirts and boots and had masks on."

"One chawed spittin'-weed," added Silent. "Yuh ought to be able to find him easy. Yeah, he sure did. And another thing—they all had guns."

"You think you're —— smart!" snapped Bunty. "What about the woman? You've told several different stories."

"That's right."

Brick grew serious.

"Silent, we've made a awful mistake thataway. Anyway—" Brick grinned at Bunty—"anyway, I can't remember just what he did tell; so we'll stick to all of 'em."

Bunty grunted with disgust over this ridiculous statement and went into the office, followed by Three Star, equally disgusted, while Brick and Silent grinned joyfully and went back up the street to the Dollar Down, where they found Harp leaning against the bar, twanging dolefully.

"Git him away," wailed a half-drunk cowboy from the Bar S, pointing at Harp. "His kinda music makes me cry, and when I cry I get mean," and then he added meaningly, "I've been cryin' quite a while now."

Harp grinned. Just then came an

interruption in the shape of three rangy-looking greyhounds, which came frisking into the front door. They trotted a circle around the room and then headed for Brick. Dogs always came to Brick.

He leaned down and was immediately the center of three plunging beasts, all seeking to get the bulk of caresses.

Brick managed to back away from them, and just then King Cleeve and Zell Mohr came in. Mohr was carrying several fresh coyote pelts, which were tied together. The inhabitants of the place surrounded them and Cleeve set up the drinks.

King Cleeve was of the cool, calculating type of gambler. There was nothing flashy about him, except that he wore an enormous yellow sapphire ring on his left hand, and the mate to it flashed from his necktie. He was of medium height, graceful in his movements, with the long, tapering hands of a man who drew a living without hard labor. His face was not unpleasant, although his eyes were shallow and his teeth too short and even to make his smile friendly.

Just now he was wearing a flannel shirt and a pair of well-worn chaps.

"It's the real sport," stated Cleeve; but there was little exultation in his voice. "Think I'll get me some dogs."

"Dogs run 'em down, eh?" wondered Brick. "That's goin' some."

"Run 'em down all right," assured Mohr. "Them dogs are runners."

"Caught four of 'em, eh?" asked Brick, examining the bundle of pelts. "Betcha them dogs had to go some. Had to shoot 'em, didn't yuh?"

"After the dogs caught 'em," nodded Mohr. "No use letting the dogs get chawed up."

"That's right," grinned Brick, fondling the lean head of a fawn-colored hound, and immediately becoming the center of the three dogs again.

Just then Lafe Freeman drove up in front of the saloon. Tied to the back of the buckboard was a heating-stove, which threatened to cave in the rear of the flimsy vehicle. Lafe came in. He nodded to several of the men.

"Hear about the robbery, Cleeve?"

Cleeve nodded.

"Yes. We met the sheriff down the street. He didn't seem to know much about it."

"He wouldn't," said Lafe. "Yuh can't expect him to. I think Limpy is goin' after 'em himself. As I came past his shack he was packin' a horse and he had a riding-horse saddled."

Mohr turned from the bar and spoke to his dogs.

"Yuh got some nice dogs there," remarked Brick.

Mohr nodded and turned to King Cleeve.

"Reckon I'll be goin', Cleeve. You keep them hides. As soon as I can get them pups I'll let yuh know."

The crowd at the bar broke up. Brick and Silent watched Lafe swing out of town, team on the run as usual.

"We'll borrow a couple of horses from Wesson," said Brick as the three of them crossed the street.

"I'd kinda like to chase coyotes," observed Silent.

"Go ahead," said Brick. "Don't let me stop yuh. At that you'd likely catch as many as them hounds did."

"Whatcha mean?" asked Silent quickly, but Brick did not say.

Cale Wesson let them have the pick of his stable, and as they started down the street Limpy rode from behind the blacksmith shop, leading a packed horse.

"Goin' huntin' outlaws, Limpy?" asked Brick.

Limpy squinted at Brick, glanced back up the street, where a number of men were standing in front of the Dollar Down, and then back at Brick.

"I dunno—yet. If this danged pack-animal will git animated a little I'll ride as far as the forks with yuh."

Brick swung in behind the pack-horse, and that worthy animal, knowing the meaning of such actions, broke into a lope.

Three miles from town, at the forks of Whisperin' Creek, Brick, Silent and Harp waved good-by to Limpy Squires, and then swung into the low hills of the Nine Bar Nine range.

"She-e-e was a shrinkin' vi'let
And I loved her ten-n-n-der-lee-e-e.
I called her-r-r mine, my I-i-iodine,
But she nev-v-v-er came back to me-e-e."

Silent's face gradually came back to normal as he wailed the last line. Harp Harris gave an extra doleful twang to his jew's-harp and nodded in appreciation.

"Yuh might like to know that Iodine ain't a girl's name," remarked Brick from

where he sat on the edge of a bunk, massaging his toes, which were encased in an all-too-tight boot.

"This one was named that," retorted Silent.

"Iodine is a medicine."

"So was she—good medicine, Brick."

Silent watched Brick rubbing his toes.

"What yuh ought to do is this, Brick; massage your feet with a meat-grinder and then pour the results into a sausage-skin. What in —— a feller wants to pinch——"

"Them is my feet," stated the ungrammatical Brick.

"That there was my song," reminded Silent, "but you took exceptions to it."

"Some folks takes exceptions to my music," observed Harp.

"Not me."

Brick shook his head seriously.

"I like it, Harp. Sounds like a dyin' Injun with his head in a barrel—and I hate Injuns."

"A feller can wear a hat that's too small, and all she does is fall off," stated Silent, "but when he bunches his toes inside a boot what is three sizes too small— Of course, if I was a tin-horn gambler or was in love——"

Brick glared at Silent for a moment, but the pain in his foot drew his attention away. He hooked the heel of the offending boot over the end of the bunk and pulled his foot out, with a sigh of relief. He picked up the boot and looked it over.

"Takes a lot of argument, but sometimes yuh show sense," remarked Silent. "I knowed a feller down in Wyoming who was a heap like you, Brick. He was herdin' sheep for a while, but he didn't have sense enough to herd sheep, so he——"

Silent ducked just in time to escape the thrown boot, but as he ducked his head hit the table-top a resounding whack. He staggered back, clutching at his forehead, dazed. He started for Brick, who was convulsed with laughter and unable to defend himself.

"If yuh kill him I'll never play for yuh again," declared Harp, stepping in front of Silent.

"O-o-o-oh, mama mine!" choked Brick. "If it hadn't been for that table he'd 'a' dropped his head on the floor!"

"By cripes, yuh must think that's funny!" howled Silent. "If yuh do you've got another think comin'."

"Nobody told yuh to hammer the table with your head."

Silent groaned and massaged his forehead. Finally he grinned and said:

"Well, are we goin' to town, Brick? Thousand dollars ain't much, but it helps a lot in these stingy times."

"Funny that the Whippoorwill don't raise that ante," remarked Brick, pulling on his old boots. "The county never lost nothin', but still they offers a thousand."

IT WAS three days after the robbery, but no one had found the slightest trace of the bandits. Conjectures were rife as to the contents of the iron box. The superintendent of the Whippoorwill mine refused to issue any statement of the amount, and beyond the probable value, based on Limpy's estimate of the weight, there was nothing to show the extent of the haul.

And Limpy had disappeared. Whether on the track of the bandits or on personal business, no one knew. Limpy had been very brief in his statements, and outside of his first words to the sheriff, had not mentioned the woman. No one except Silent, Lafe, Brick and Limpy actually knew what happened at the hold-up.

Brick and Silent had not been to Marlin since the day of the robbery, but Harp had made the trip each day, gathering the latest gossip. Harp had no idea of why they wanted first news of the reward, but it was easier to ride to Marlin and loaf around than it was to work on the ranch. If the Nine Bar Nine wanted to pay him for loafing in town, fine. And besides it gave him a chance to learn a lot of new tunes on his harp.

Brick and Silent had deliberated on letting Harp in on the proposition. Harp was a square-shooter. He was fast with a gun and a top rider. They finally decided to let Harp in on their secret.

As they rode away from the ranch Brick told Harp and let him read the note.

"Well, ——!" drawled Harp delightedly. "She's a dead open and shut. Let's go and arrest him."

"Him!" snorted Brick. "We seen three, and from this note it looks like four. One of them initials, I reckon it's J, stands for the female. We'll kinda investigate this here Martin, but for gosh sake use a little sense, will yuh? We ain't got a danged thing except this letter."

At the scene of the hold-up they swung off the grade and rode down to the pine thicket. The stage was still there, but Freeman had hired Joe Le Blanc to haul the wagon to his shop at Marlin City.

Brick dismounted and walked down from the stage until he reached a point where the top of the stage was barely visible. Then he searched the ground. Suddenly he grunted and picked up an empty .45-70 cartridge-shell. Silent and Harp looked at it.

"World is full of .45-70's," stated Silent.

Brick nodded and examined the cartridge. To all appearances it was an ordinary cartridge-shell. No one except a gun crank would give it a second glance. Brick turned it around in his fingers, feeling of it carefully.

To all appearances the cartridge was old. It was spotted with verdigris and scratched as if it had been handled considerably.

Brick noted this. In a country where there was much use for rifle-shooting it seemed strange that any man would have an old cartridge in his possession. A hold-up man would rarely take a chance of using an old cartridge in a repeating rifle—or in any gun for that matter.

Brick examined the butt of this shell, and noted that it was slightly swollen. The firing-pin of the rifle had dented the primer near the top, fairly cutting into the brass rim of the cartridge. Brick glanced at the others.

"Likely the one they shot past my head," grinned Silent. "Reckon I'm lucky to be able to look calmly upon that ca'tridge-shell."

Brick dropped the shell into his pocket and got back on his horse.

"He's thinkin'," observed Silent. "That shell means a lot to him, Harp. Shouldn't be afraid to bet that he knows them bandits' ancestors by their first name by now."

"Sure," nodded Harp. "Betcha he even knows it was fired in a .45-70."

Brick turned in his saddle and grinned at Harp.

"I might fool yuh on the way I'd bet."

"And," observed Silent, "they send 'em to the loco lodge for thinkin' they're somethin' that they ain't."

Brick led them straight through the main street of Marlin City. Bunty Blair was standing in front of the Dollar Down, and when he saw them he sauntered over toward the hitch-rack as if to meet them when they rode up; but they never even looked at him as they rode past.

"That's high-tonin' the law," grinned Silent, watching Bunty from the corner of his eye. "Mister Blair likely was wishful to ask questions. Believe me, cowboys, we'll hookum cow on this deal. When we turn our prisoners over to the law we'll take receipt."

"Yuh can't figure on chicken stew by lookin' at a nest full of aigs," reminded Brick. "We're goin ' to be danged lucky to find out who done it, and then we'll likely earn a lot more than a thousand dollars landin' 'em. We know there was two men and a woman, which makes it equal to about five men."

"How do yuh figure thataway?" asked Harp.

"That's right, Harp—you never seen that woman."

THE Weeping Tree ranch was what might be termed a derelict. The ranch had changed hands numberless times, and it appeared that each new owner had added a room or two to the rambling ranch-house until it had grown to be almost a complete rectangle, in the center of which grew a gnarled weeping-willow tree.

The old tumble-down barn also had many angles, and from the number of pole corrals it appeared that each owner had had a pet idea of corral construction. The ranch-house had no protection from the elements, and it appeared that each addition had shrunk away from its neighbor until it was almost possible to look between all the additions to the original ranch-house.

Smoke was drifting from the stove-pipe, or rather one of the stove-pipes, when the three cowboys rode into the rectangle and dismounted.

"Whatcha goin' to say to him?" asked Silent.

"Party call," grinned Brick.

"Independent party," chuckled Harp, remembering the recent election.

They started away from their horses, but stopped. A woman was singing:

"Oh! Ye'll tak' the high-road and I'll tak' the low-road,
And I'll be in Scotland a-fore ye,
But me and my true love will never meet again
On the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond."

The words ceased, but the rich throaty contralto hummed the chorus of the old Scotch song once more. Brick Davidson's

mother had been Scotch—and she had sung this same song to him. It had been years since Brick had heard it, and it brought back a rush of memories—memories of a sweet-faced woman who used to cuddle him in her arms and call him "laddie o' mine."

Brick was not sentimental, but just now he found himself, hat in hand, staring down at the ground. He glanced at his companions. Harp was staring at the open door, mouth open. Silent had stepped back against his horse and was standing with his arms folded and eyes closed.

Brick's eyes switched back to the door just as the owner of the voice appeared. For a moment she did not see them—her eyes seemingly looking far away. Then she gave a start of surprize.

She was not beautiful. Her face was tanned, her hair a tumbled brown mass, and a smudge of black discolored one of her cheeks. The faded blue-calico dress, the dejected attitude, might have made her a pathetic figure; but she was too tall, too visibly healthy to be pathetic.

"Ma'am," said Brick softly, "yuh got a beauty-spot."

Her hand went slowly to her cheek and a smile flashed across her face.

"I've been trying to fix that darned stove-pipe. When I get it level the stove won't stand up, and when I get the stove level the pipe won't fit. Know anything about stoves?"

"I'm a expert on 'em," stated Silent.

"Not saggin' ones," corrected Brick. "I'm the sag expert."

There was a three-cornered rush for the doorway, but Brick was the first one inside.

Some time, in the dim and distant past, this stove might have had four legs; but now it rested its four corners on a stone, two bricks, an old kettle and a block of wood. The rusty pipe, of odd lengths, made several angles before entering the tin-protected hole in the roof.

The three cowboys surrounded the stove and examined it carefully. The section of pipe which connected to the top of the stove had been freshly cut, but Silent did not note this trifling detail.

"The —— fool that cut this must 'a' been cross-eyed," he declared. "No wonder it won't fit when the stove's level."

"I'm not much of a mechanic," admitted the girl soberly.

"Aw-w-w," choked Silent, coloring to the roots of his hair. "Aw, I can see where yuh made the mistake, ma'am; one of the corners was saggin'. Anybody'd make the same mistake."

Brick removed the offending section of pipe and proceeded to ruin his pet pocket-knife in cutting the pipe square across, while Silent and Harp shifted nervously from one foot to the other.

"She's a small world, ma'am," declared Silent, "but I ain't never met yuh before. I'm Melville Slade. Folks calls me Silent 'cause I never have much to say. This one here is Harp Harris. The pipe-cutter over there is named Brick Davidson."

"Harp ain't my right name, ma'am."

Harp said that much and then took a deep breath, like a man who had been under water a long time—or was getting ready to go under. Then he finished breathlessly—

"I was christened Cadwallader Jones Harris, ma'am."

Harp beamed with joy over his disclosure.

"I'd stick to Harp if I was you," grunted Brick. "Sayin' your full name sounds like fallin' over a door-step and hitting your head on a chair."

"Were you christened Brick?" asked the girl.

"His name's Donald Campbell Davidson," chanted Harp. "I know, 'cause I seen it on a letter."

Brick grinned at her.

"I am Jean Martin," said the girl simply.

"Jean Martin?"

Brick almost dropped the pipe.

"How do yuh spell it—with a G?"

"No, with a J. J-e-a-n."

Brick came back to the stove and fitted the pipe, while Silent and Harp watched him. It fitted. Brick wiped his hands on his chaps and smiled at her.

"I reckon she'll work now, ma'am."

"Thank you so very much. I never could have fixed it, because I am such a poor mechanic."

She looked at Silent as she finished; but Silent was looking at a Winchester hanging on a pair of deer-horns on the wall.

"You and your dad goin' to run the ranch?" asked Brick.

"We—we hope to, Mr. Davidson."

"Kinda hard for one man to run a place," observed Harp.

"There will be three of us. Jack Oliver has been with us a long time, but he isn't

here yet because he stopped to pick up some stock."

"Well," said Brick slowly, "I reckon we'll drift along, ma'am. Just stopped to say howdy."

Jean shook hands with them and stood in the doorway, waving a farewell as they rode away.

NONE of the three men spoke for a while, and then Harp remarked—

"She ought to have a new stove."

Neither of the others disputed his assertion. Silent spurred up beside Brick.

"Lemme look at that letter again, Brick."

He read it through and handed it back to Brick.

"Kinda fits," he muttered. "J and O. Watcha know about that, Brick?"

"All we've gotta do—" began Harp, but Brick whirled in his saddle.

"Do what?" he snapped.

"We-e-ll, whatcha think, Brick?"

"Lemme think, will yuh?"

"Let me think," grinned Silent. "Betcha forty dollars, Harp, that he's thinkin' right around one thing—she sure can sing."

"Like an angel," said Harp seriously. "Honest to grandma, I ain't never heard no song like that in my life. Wonder if she'd sing if a feller asked her?"

"What caliber was that Winchester carbine hangin' on the wall?" asked Brick.

"Forty-five-seventy," said Harp. "I gotta good look at it. Model 1886, open sights."

"Sure?"

"You're danged right I'm sure, but that don't spell nothin', Brick. This here country is full of .45-70's."

"I'm glad it was a .45-70."

Silent turned in his saddle and stared at Brick.

"Yuh are, are yuh?" he exploded. "Well, now lemme tell yuh somethin', cowboy; don't yuh try to hang deadwood on that lady."

"A thousand dollars is a lot of money," mused Brick.

"I ain't so danged miserly as all that," grunted Harp. "Forty a month and feed ain't so much, but yuh can live on it."

"That would mean three hundred and thirty-three dollars apiece," stated Brick seriously. "Take a long time to save up that much, if yuh don't drink much and don't gamble."

"What's time?" snorted Silent. "That ain't nothin'; is it, Harp?"

"Not in my life, Silent. Whatcha laughin' at, Brick?"

"Thinkin' what a lot of danged fools the lady has made of us three."

They rode into Marlin and left their horses at the tie-rack near the sheriff's office. A group of men were standing in front of the general store—a group that seemed strangely interested in the three cowboys.

Bunty Blair was one of the group, and now he left it and came down toward his office to meet the three.

Bunty stopped as if undecided. Then he pointed toward the door of his office and said—

"Let's go inside and have a little talk."

"What's the main idea?" asked Brick wonderingly, glancing from Bunty to the crowd in front of the store.

"Come inside and I'll tell yuh—all three of yuh."

The three cowboys glanced at each other and then followed Bunty into the office. He shut the door and faced them.

"Limpy Squires was murdered."

Brick squinted at Bunty.

"When?"

"The day of the hold-up. Shot in the back."

The cowboys exchanged glances. Limpy had never been popular with them, but who would shoot the inoffensive old crippled stage-driver? Limpy had an acrid tongue, but no one ever took exceptions to his talk—rather they were amused at his flow of profanity. Bunty straightened some papers on his desk and continued:

"He left here with you fellers. 'Topaz' Tyler was coming here from Silverton when he found him. Limpy had been dead all this time, lyin' just off the road near the forks. Topaz brought the word back, and we went out after him. We found both horses, but the pack had come loose."

Brick listened grimly to Bunty's statement; and then—

"Who do yuh reckon shot him, Bunty?"

The sheriff did not reply—did not meet Brick's intense gaze, but fumbled with the papers on his desk.

"Bringin' us in here thisaway," muttered Silent, "'pears like yuh was tryin' to keep it a secret."

"You fellers rode out of town with

Limpy," stated Bunty slowly. "I'd kinda like to know where you left him."

"At the forks," replied Harp.

Bunty's grin was crooked and his voice was mildly sarcastic.

"Looks kinda queer."

"Wait a minute," snapped Brick. "You insinuating that we had anything to do with shootin' Limpy Squires?"

"No, I ain't, Davidson; but there's a few things that——"

"Why should we harm Limpy?" demanded Silent.

"There's a lot of things that need explaining. That hold-up, for instance. You two and Limpy come here with a cock-and-bull story about female road-agents, and then you admit you're lyin' about the woman. You laugh like it was a good joke.

"Davidson, you and Slade stay out at the ranch and send Harp in to town to see what he can find out. Looks kinda queer to me, if anybody asks yuh."

"Yeah?" drawled Brick innocently.

"It does," stated Bunty, who seemed to grow bolder when he found that the fiery Brick remained indifferent to the half-accusation.

"I'm waiting for you to talk."

"Oh!" grunted Brick, recovering from his abstraction.

"Whatcha say, Bunty?"

"I said I was waiting for an explanation."

"Well, now that's sure thoughtful of yuh," nodded Brick. "If yuh only wait long enough, Sun-Dog County will grow to be a State and you might be elected governor. Ever'thin' comes to them who waits, Bunty."

"I want that explanation right now! *Sabe?*"

"Who's Topaz Tyler?" asked Brick suddenly. "He's a new one on me."

"I know'm," grunted Harp. "He punched cows for the Diamond H outfit in Idaho till they caught him cheatin' in a poker game. Tall, skinny tin-horn with educated fingers. Wears a six and three-quarter hat and a number five boot."

"You used to be in Idaho too, didn't yuh, Bunty?" asked Brick.

"That ain't answering my questions!" snapped the sheriff.

"I want you to explain about that hold-up—the truth of it; *sabe?*"

"Yo're takin' a lot upon yourself," smiled Brick. "When in —— did you get the right to ask questions, Bunty? 'Pears to me like you're gettin' personal."

"I'm the sheriff, ain't I?"

"Well," drawled Brick, "you keep right on bein' the sheriff and nobody's goin' to molest yuh, Bunty. Speakin' of Idaho, 'pears like that State's well represented around here. Bunty comes from there, and Silent used to live in that country, and now comes Topaz Tyler. Mebbe we can have a reunion."

"Feller what bought the Weepin' Tree outfit is from Idaho," volunteered Harp. "Leastwise I seen a box out there with his name on it and it also had the words 'Cottonwood, Ida.' I-d-a means Idaho, don't it?"

"And," added Silent, "if I ain't so danged badly mistaken King Cleeve's from Idaho. Mebbe not lately, yuh understand, but——"

Silent broke off and stared at the opposite wall.

Then his face broke into a smile of wonderment.

"What's a joke?" asked Brick, grinning an accompaniment.

"Nothin', Brick; I was just thinkin'."

"What's all this about?" demanded the sheriff testily. "I asks for an explanation and I gets a lot of fool talk. I want that explanation—now!"

"And if we refuse to talk—what then?" asked Brick.

"Well, I'll have to present such facts as I have to the county attorney."

Brick grinned at Bunty and shook his head.

"You ain't got no facts, Bunty, but do the best with what yuh have. A top-buggy ain't nothin' to hunt outlaws in, and if the county attorney ain't got no more sense than you have, the two of yuh ought to be able to hang some half-witted sheepherder for killin' Limpy. Do yuh want to arrest any of us?"

"No—not now—not yet."

"Stutterin' loosens your teeth," stated Brick. "Come on."

The three of them filed out, leaving Bunty Blair glaring down at the top of his desk, his nerve almost gone. He reflected that it was a good thing that Brick Davidson had taken it as a joke. Bunty had been forced, against his will, to demand an explanation from the three cowboys. They had refused.

The bunch of men were no longer in front of the store. As Brick and his two companions went up the narrow sidewalk a tall cowboy came across from the Dollar Down, heading for the store.

"That's Topaz Tyler," said Harp.

"Walks like he had club feet."

"That's how Brick's goin' to walk if he don't wear proper boots," declared Silent seriously; but Brick was studying Topaz Tyler and did not resent Silent's implication.

There was no question but what Topaz was wearing tight boots—not only tight, but also expensive. In fact, his whole make-up bespoke the dandy. Light-blue silk shirt, lavender muffler, trousers with a diagonal stripe and the finest of black calf-skin boots, with the softest of tops. His hat was of the "five-gallon" Southwest type, surmounted with a snakeskin band. In his hand he carried a pair of gray gauntlet gloves, beaded and fringed. He merely glanced at the three cowboys as he passed and went into the store.

"Smokin' one of them Turk cigarets!" grunted Silent, wrinkling his long nose. "Jockey Club per-fume and burnin' camel-hair. Waugh! I'd kiss him if he didn't smoke."

"Where'd he get the nickname, Harp?" asked Brick.

"Wears 'em," grinned Harp. "Look at his vest-buttons, Brick. All topazes. Wears a big one on a rosette to hold his muffler, and he's got two or three on his fingers. Kinda nutty, I reckon. Feller told me that Tyler found a smoky topaz as big as a goose-egg and had a jeweler cut it up for him."

Brick nodded and turned into the store. Silent and Harp followed on his heels. There were several men in the store. Le Blanc the blacksmith, Cale Wesson the storekeeper, King Cleeve, Lynn Barnhardt of the Lazy H, Lowdermilk, who bought stock for the Eastern markets, and Topaz Tyler.

Topaz turned from purchasing a package of tobacco and glanced at Brick and his companions. He glanced at Harp Harris, but turned and began to roll a cigaret. None of the men said a word, although it was evident that there had been earnest conversation prior to the coming of the three cowboys.

"Gimme a pack of smokin', Cale," said Brick, moving up to the counter.

"When did yuh leave Smoky Creek, Topaz?" asked Harp.

Topaz turned and stared at Harp, the tobacco trickling from the crimped paper in his hand.

"Smoky Creek?" he parroted. "I reckon yuh got the best of me, pardner."

"If I did it's the first time anybody has—when yuh was lookin'," returned Harp seriously.

Topaz let the paper slip out of his hand, but kept his hands above his waist-line. It looked too much like a challenge for him to drop his hands.

"Just what do yuh mean?" he asked.

"I used to work for the Diamond H."

"Oh, yeah."

Topaz relaxed.

"Sa-a-ay, you're the feller who used to play the jew's-harp. Still twangin' along?"

"Yeah," grinned Harp. "Kinda."

"Smoky Creek," said Brick thoughtfully, turning. "Name's familiar somehow. Didn't a feller by name of Martin used to live around there?"

Topaz shifted his eyes to Brick's face and their eyes met. Topaz turned back to Harp, but neither of them answered Brick's question.

"Snubbed!" grunted Brick, licking the edge of a cigaret paper. "A fool and his questions never gits answered," and then added reflectively: "She's kinda funny about so many Idaho folks movin' over here, ain't it? Anybody'd think they quit runnin' cows over there."

King Cleeve gave Brick a searching glance, but Brick's face told him nothing. Silent was laughing silently, his homely face wreathed in deep lines. He looked at King Cleeve, and it seemed to convulse him, but no sound came from his wide mouth.

King Cleeve's eyes narrowed. Silent's laugh was almost an insult—that kind of laugh; and he was looking directly at King Cleeve.

Suddenly the door opened and a man came in. He was about fifty years of age, sandy-haired, his thin face plentifully sprinkled with freckles. His arms were long, his shoulders sloping; but he carried himself with a wiry ease, and the sleeves of his faded shirt seemed to stretch under the relaxed arm muscles. His gun was tied down to a rosette on his chaps, the butt swung out at an angle which hinted at fast work.

His glance quickly took in the inhabitants of the store. For a moment his eyes shifted from one to another, and then he moved in close to the counter. Wesson walked up and leaned across the counter. Without taking his eyes off the group, the newcomer gave his order and leaned easily against the counter while Wesson tied up the purchases. Then he paid, half-turned, opened the door and stepped out, still half-facing the interior. He carried his purchases in his left hand.

No one spoke for several moments after the door closed, and then Le Blanc said:

"She's got wan strong look, dees Martin, eh? Bah gosh, she's tip ovair cow with hands, I'm bet."

"Where'd he come from, Cale?" asked Barnhardt.

Wesson shook his head.

"I dunno, Lynn. You know, Cleeve?"

King Cleeve shook his head.

"Idaho, I think," said Brick. "Near Cottonwood or Smoky Creek."

Silent laughed again, but this time it was not silently. Every man in the place looked at him, but Silent gave them no heed. Finally he turned on his heel and walked outside.

"Slade acts like he was loco," observed King Cleeve.

"Acts like a —— fool, if you ask me," stated Topaz.

"If anybody asks yuh," agreed Brick, and added, "but nobody asked yuh."

"What do you mean?"

Topaz glared at Brick angrily.

"Want a diagram?" grinned Brick. "If yuh don't, I'll just say yo're pretty new to be passin' opinions."

"Now, now, quit jawin'," interrupted Wesson, who knew Brick very, very well indeed. "Sayin' this 'n' that back and forth is apt to make enemies; don't yuh know it?" and then added meaningly, "There's been one killin' this week and gosh knows that's a plenty in these quiet times."

Topaz, without a reply, walked outside and crossed to the Dollar Down. Brick grinned.

"Friend of yours; ain't he, Cleeve?"

"Mine?"

King Cleeve was astonished.

"Not that anybody knows of."

"Oh! Not that anybody—knows—of."

King Cleeve slid from his seat on the counter and straightened the creases in his trousers. He feigned not to have noticed Brick's tone of voice, and when he straightened up his face was blandly innocent.

"Me, I'm thinkin' she's goin' to rain."

Le Blanc stood up and yawned widely.

"Where?" asked Harp. "It ain't goin' to rain here, Frenchy."

"She's goin' t' be long dry spell if she don'," grinned Le Blanc, and headed for the door.

"That cinches the drink on you, Harp," grinned Brick. "C'mon."

OUTSIDE they found Silent sitting on the sidewalk, contemplating a faded and torn two-year-old circus poster which adorned the building just across the street. He looked soberly up at Brick and moved aside to let him sit down.

"What did yuh laugh for, Silent?"

Brick's tone was mildly reproving.

"I had to," grinned Brick. "Lemme tell yuh something, which yuh likely won't believe; I was in jail once."

"I don't believe it," declared Brick. "You was in jail more'n once."

"I can remember this one. It was a little town in Idaho I got into a argument with a feller. I reckon I was drinkin' a little too much. Anyway I licked him. Then two fellers hopped on me and helped him put me in jail. He was the sheriff. There was only one cell—a big one. I didn't mind, 'cause there was a good bed in there.

"I don't know what time it was—night, I reckon—when I hears two men come inside. They unlocks the door, and one of 'em shoves the other feller inside and locks up again. After he's gone I lights a match and looks at this feller. He's been handled considerable and ain't payin' much attention to things. I went back to sleep, and pretty soon I'm woke up.

"The place is full of men. They smashes in the cell door, falls upon me in a mess and yanks me plumb outside with a rope around my neck. I can't holler nor nothin'. I gets yanked and hauled for quite some ways, and then they stops. I hear somebody sayin', '——, that ain't no way to tie a proper knot,' and then somebody else says, 'Ain't yuh goin' to let him say anythin'?'

"Then somebody lights a match and takes a look at my face. I seen his face in

the light of that match. It was all bloody and white. Then he said:

"'——! This ain't him, boys!'

"They crowds around me and gets a look.

"'Git back to the jail!' orders the feller who looked at me first, and they left me on my back out there under a tree.

"I found my bronc and I sure rattled his hocks out of there."

Silent rubbed his neck thoughtfully and grinned widely.

"Yeah," admitted Brick; "it sure was funny, Silent. What else?"

"Yuh can laugh now," replied Silent. "The man they throwed into my own little cell was—King Cleeve."

"Aw-w-w-w!"

Brick grunted his unbelief.

"I'm sure as ——!" declared Silent. "Always I've wondered where I seen his face, and when he was talkin' about Idaho——"

"When do we laugh?" asked Harp.

"When I tell yuh that this here jigger that bought the Weepin' Tree outfit was the person who lit that match and saved my neck."

"Martin!" exclaimed Brick.

"Uh-huh."

"Silent, is this straight goods, or are yuh romancin'?" asked Brick seriously.

"——'s truth! I carries them faces photygraphed on my brain, y'betcha. 'Course Martin was all bloody-like, but I know that face. I was kinda bothered about Cleeve, bein' as he was beat up a lot, and not of much consequence to me—not like Martin was."

"Which makes a different color horse," sighed Brick. "Things are almost as clear as mud."

"Cleeve must 'a' been gone when they went back to the jail," observed Harp. "They busted the door and he just walked out; don't yuh see? After they takes you away he jist naturally went——"

"As a detective you plays real sweetly on the jew's-harp," remarked Brick. "Let's go home before Harp explains the whole mystery."

"Well—" Harp was very serious—"well, of course there's a chance that——"

"Chances are you're right, Harp," admitted Brick. "I hope the stove-pipe draws well. Must take a *pasear* out there again real soon."

"We must," agreed Silent; and Harp nodded, but added:

"After observin' her paw, I'd say we better go one at a time—we'll last longer. Let's have another li'l shot before we go."

THE Whippoorwill men seemed to make little effort to apprehend the robbers. Limpy was dead; therefore unable to tell of the actual occurrence. Silent and Brick refused to talk about it.

Bunty Blair hinted at evidence—nothing absolute, but something that might incriminate a couple of unintelligent cowboys. He did not designate them by name, but every one knew whom he meant.

Brick, Silent and Harp were stumped. Silent and Harp were sure that Scott Martin, Jean and Jack Oliver were the guilty parties, but they were equally sure that they—Silent and Harp—did not want the reward, and they were also sure that they were going to act as a stumbling-block to any one else that tried to collect.

Brick spent a lot of time alone, thinking, and his actions were looked upon darkly by Silent and Harp. None of them had been out to the Weeping Tree ranch since that one day.

Just now Silent and Harp had come in from repairing a corral at Silver Spring. Brick was not at the ranch. Sing Moy, the god of the kitchen, was the only inhabitant. They asked him where Brick was.

"You go—he go," stated Sing. "Mebby-so go town."

"Jist like that!" exploded Silent. "Send us out to fix a darned old corral that nobody ever uses, and then he goes to town. Let's me and you go to town. He-e-e-y, Harp! Quit mournin' on that groan-organ. Let's go to town."

Harp shoved himself away from the side of the house and wiped the back of his hand across his lips, after which he carefully wrapped the offending instrument before putting it in his pocket.

The fact that he had sent Silent and Harp to repair a perfectly good corral, giving him a chance to go alone to Marlin City, was not stinging Brick Davidson's conscience. In fact, Brick was very, very busy, trying to capture a glass of liquor which seemed to elude his every effort. Brick stepped back from the bar, looking cross-eyed at the glass, and then cautiously stalked it with his hands.

There is no denying the fact that Brick was beautifully drunk—if such an adjective may be used to describe his present condition. He was also very joyful. He loved all the world, and made it publicly known that his soul was fairly reeking with milk and honey.

He insisted that Topaz Tyler was as near perfect as any human being could be—and still live. He dilated on the virtues of Topaz. Then he eulogized King Cleeve, whom he pronounced a "pup-pup-prince." Brick did not stammer over any other words but King Cleeve didn't mind.

Brick was staggering drunk when he entered the Dollar Down and cast his bleared eyes around the place. Bunty Blair was there, but Bunty did not linger. Brick was not yet drunk enough to disturb the peace, and Bunty knew that when Brick got drunk enough to be safely handled he would be too drunk to disturb any one.

But Brick was not mean. Oh, far from it. He even said, "Thank you," when King Cleeve said, "Well, here's regards."

Brick grew confidential with King Cleeve. Did Cleeve have any idea who held up the stage? King Cleeve did not. Brick hinted darkly that he did. In fact, he had a document that would clear up the mystery.

"What do you mean?" asked Cleeve.

"I never shed," grinned Brick drunkenly, patting a pocket of his vest, "I got shome evidence; y' understand?"

King Cleeve patted Brick on the back and wished him luck. He told Brick that there was nobody he would sooner see win the thousand dollars.

Then came Topaz Tyler, and King invited him to join them. For a man who was already drunk Brick stood an amazing lot of liquor. Topaz and Cleeve mourned over the fact that they could not drink liquor as Brick could. It was a gift. They boasted over his ability, and Brick's chest swelled. Brick admitted that he was a wonder.

But finally a glass of liquor eluded him. Then he stalked it, cautiously. King Cleeve's foot was elevated on the bar-rail, his leg encased in a very expensive, pearl-colored trouser. Brick threw caution to the winds and scooped the glass off the bar, and its contents splashed on Cleeve's immaculate knee.

Brick chuckled with glee and sat down heavily on the floor, while King Cleeve swore at the ruination of his new trousers. A swamper volunteered to remove Brick, but Cleeve and Topaz declined his assistance. Wasn't Brick their friend?

They lifted him to his unstable feet and piloted him out of the back door, where they propped him up on some empty kegs, afterward removing the folded note from his inside vest pocket. Then they staggered up to Cleeve's room over the saloon and sat down on the bed. It had been a mighty job to anesthetize Brick Davidson with whisky, but they were sure, judging from their own condition, that the job had been thoroughly done.

King Cleeve read the note with both eyes, and then read it with one eye shut. Topaz nodded over it and stared at King Cleeve. Then they both went to sleep.

SILENT and Harp tied their horses to the saloon rack and came inside. Silent approached the bar and asked the bartender if he had seen Brick Davidson lately. The bartender grinned.

"Went out the back door a while ago, but I don't reckon he went far."

"Drunk?" asked Silent.

"Well—" the bartender did not want to reflect any discredit on Brick's ability—"well, I—I hope so."

"Why hope so?" inquired Harp.

"I'll tell yuh; Davidson was seven-eighths drunk when he came here, and he drank enough here to float a canoe."

"Son of a gun!" breathed Silent, and headed for the back door with Harp on his heels.

Yes, Brick was there. His head jerked sidewise as they came out of the door, and he looked up at them with streaming, agonized eyes. Tears coursed down his cheeks and dripped off his chin.

"May I herd sheep if he ain't bawlin'!" gasped Silent. "What's the matter, cowboy?"

Brick shook his head and handed the little bottle which he held in his hand to Silent.

"Sm-smell it," he choked.

Silent put the bottle to his nose and sniffed. Like a flash his head jerked back and he dropped the bottle.

"Uh-h-h-h—woosh!"

Silent's choking wheeze was very emphatic. Brick sobbed with joy.

"What in —— is that?"

Silent's eyes were full of tears and his nose twitched violently.

"Oil of mustard," grinned Brick. "Ain't she a humdinger? Doc Lindsay gave it to me."

"What's it for?" asked Harp.

"Soberin' up. Kicks the booze out of your head, *muy pronto*."

"Spend your good money for liquor and then blow your head off to get rid of it!"

Silent wiped the tears off his cheeks and glared down at Brick.

"You're a disgrace to Sun-Dog County, Brick Davidson."

Brick got up and yawned. His legs wobbled a little as he walked around the rear of the saloon and over to the hitch-rack, where he stopped and apologized to Silent and Harp for acting so disgracefully. Silent and Harp looked with distrust upon this apology. Brick was very meek.

"Yessir," nodded Silent as if to an invisible person. "Yessir, when I come to think about it, I do. Crazy, yuh say? Well, yuh know how it is—a feller kinda hates to say, but now that yuh mentioned it—yeah, I reckon you're right. No, I won't mention any certain thing, y'understand, but jist take mostly anythin' he's ever done—you're welcome, I'm sure."

Silent nodded and turned back to Brick and Harp. Brick laughed, but it was not a drunken laugh. Heroic measures had driven the alcohol from his head, leaving him a trifle unsteady on his feet, but otherwise cold sober.

Brick's laugh nettled Silent.

"You hoodled us away so yuh could come to town alone and git drunk, didn't yuh? Yes, yuh did, Brick. Ain'tcha got no feelin's?"

Brick was busy searching his pockets and ignored Silent's question. Brick swore softly.

"Gone," he muttered.

"What—your feelin's?" grunted Silent.

"I had a note in my pocket—" began Brick.

"Aw-w-w-w, gosh!" groaned Silent. "You went and lost that note? Yuh didn't, did yuh, Brick?"

Brick nodded and searched his pockets again.

"Where did yuh lose it?" inquired Harp.

"Where did he?"

Silent glared at Harp, and then hammered on the hitch-rack.

"Where did he lose it? Harp, some day you're goin' to ask a question and I'm goin' to kill yuh dead—right when yuh finish askin'. If he knowed where he lost it he'd know where he was when he lost it, wouldn't he?"

Silent snorted his disgust.

"He'd know," nodded Harp. "He'd know where he was when he lost it if he was sober enough to know where he was when he lost it; but if he——"

Silent clenched his hands and rubbed his shoulder into Harp's chest, shoving him slowly backward.

"Please don't speak, Harp," he begged. "Don't speak."

"Don't speak to him, Harp," grinned Brick.

"I won't," promised Harp. "I ain't got nothin' to say to the —— fool. Where do yuh think yuh lost it, Brick?"

"Think!" Silent snorted. "What would he think with?"

Harp looked mildly at the exasperated Silent and then turned his back. Silent snorted again and went across toward the store, walking stiff-legged like an angry bear.

"He's angry with me and you," grinned Brick. "Mebbe he'll be mad quite a while."

"Let's me and you go into the saloon," suggested Harp. "Betcha forty dollars he brings a peace-pipe, 'cause he's thirsty."

The bartender was idly wiping a glass as they came in, and the glass fell from his fingers, making a dull *plop!* in the rinsing-tub under the bar. He stared at Brick, who walked up to the bar, talking to Harp. There was nothing about Brick's actions that would indicate he had ever had a drink.

"Hooch," said Harp.

"The best yuh got," added Brick. "I'm dry."

The bartender's hand shook as he placed the required articles before them. He wondered if Brick was one of twins, or if any man could handle that much— Well, if he wasn't one of twins, it was a sinful waste of liquor.

Bunty Blair came in and sat down at an unused card-table before he saw that Brick was still there. Bunty had expected that Brick had been laid away long before this; and Bunty watched, fascinated, as Brick rolled a cigaret with one hand and never spilled the tobacco. Then Bunty stared at the table-top. It was beyond him.

Silent came in and leaned against the bar.

"Normal again?" asked Brick.

Silent cleared his throat dryly, and Brick nodded to the bartender. Then Brick looked at Bunty, who turned away.

Brick nudged Harp, who grinned at Bunty. Then Brick turned to Silent.

"How long since you was in Idaho, Silent?"

"Nine or ten years, I reckon."

"Did sheriffs use top-buggies to chase outlaws with?"

A man at a poker-table laughed, and several men turned and looked at Bunty. Brick had plenty of respect for the law, and in spite of his wild escapades stayed within it, but he detested Bunty Blair.

Bunty got up from the table and faced Brick. Bunty hated ridicule worse than anything else, and his soul seethed with a desire to obliterate this red-headed nuisance. He did not speak for a moment, evidently trying to control his voice, but there was a decided catch in it when he said—

"There are times when a sheriff can't even use a top-buggy to follow outlaws."

"Yeah?"

Brick leaned back, elbows on top of the bar, and grinned widely.

"When is them times, Bunty?"

"They don't make saloon doors wide enough."

Brick laughed, loudly, joyously. Bunty's hand was at the butt of his holstered Colt and he had stepped away from the table far enough to give him room to draw. Brick knew that Bunty was fast enough with a gun; knew that Bunty would likely take a chance when he had all the advantage.

BRICK was in no position to reach for his gun. In fact, he gave no sign that he might reach for a gun. He laughed.

Every eye in the place was on Brick. Then Brick's eyes shifted from Bunty's face to a point behind Bunty. Like a flash the laugh died from Brick's lips and a look of horror came. He started to speak.

Bunty whirled, falling for an old trick; and before he could recover Brick had flung himself away from the bar, wrapping his arms around Bunty, and the two of them went over a chair and crashed to the floor. Brick staggered to his feet, still holding his grip. He removed Bunty's pistol and tossed it away.

Bunty cursed wildly and kicked Brick on the leg; whereupon Brick whirled Bunty to the doorway and flung him bodily into the street. Bunty staggered to his feet and limped straight toward his office without a backward glance. Silent and Harp were backed against the bar, guns in their hands, watching the crowd for a hostile move.

Brick looked at the crowd.

"I reckon you gents will pardon the confusion, won't yuh?"

No one objected. Silent and Harp walked over to Brick, and the three of them went outside and headed for the hitch-rack.

"Now yuh went and done it," complained Silent, looking back as they rode out of town. "Yuh antagonized the sheriff a lot, Brick. He won't forget that, y'betcha. Yuh went and got drunk and lost that letter and——"

"But with all my faults yuh love me still," added Brick.

"Well—" Silent shook his head slowly—"well, yuh do the dangedest things, Brick. I ain't kickin' about yuh huggin' Bunty Blair. She makes me no never mind how he feels, but that note was important. Suppose somebody finds it? Tell yuh one thing, though, Brick; I'm goin' to——"

"Where did yuh leave that letter?" interrupted Harp.

Brick turned in his saddle and stared at Harp.

"Leave it?"

"We're all in on this, ain't we?"

Harp was very serious.

"All right. Yuh can go ahead and tell us why yuh went and got drunk, Brick. Yuh didn't get drunk for fun, that's a cinch. Now, where is that letter?"

Brick grinned in appreciation of Harp's deductions.

"What makes yuh think I didn't lose it, Harp?"

"'Cause yuh never worried about it. I know danged well you'd be r'arin' around to beat —— if yuh lost it."

"It's hid in the bunk-house."

"Aw-w-w, ——!"

Silent's disgust was very pronounced.

"Yuh never lost no note, yuh danged red-headed——"

"Yeah, I lost a note, Silent."

"Whatcha mean, Brick?"

Brick laughed and looked back down the dusty road.

"I went into the Dollar Down, actin' as drunk as a shepherd on a vacation. Mamma mine, I sure was drunk as a boiled owl. I invited Cleeve to participate, and then Topaz Tyler joined us.

"I drank all I could handle and then I sets down on the floor, after I dumped a glass of hooch over Cleeve's ice-cream pants. Cleeve and Topaz led me out behind the place and swiped the note. They sure was lit up plentiful."

"But about this here note," said Slient.

"I hinted that I had a note; *sabe?* I said I had evidence in my pocket. They picked it out of my inside pocket and all it said was—

"Since when did Nature start muzzlin' coyotes?"

Silent and Harp stared at Brick.

"You're awful crazy," declared Silent. "Awful crazy. What good did it do to let 'em steal that from you?"

"I dunno," admitted Brick, "but I'm just kinda peckin' around, like a woodpecker on a tree. There's a worm-hole some'ers, and I'm goin' to be the early bird."

"I think you're crazy," said Silent, and then to Harp, "You agree with me, don't yuh?"

"Think ——! I know he is, Silent."

"I'm just as happy as though I had good sense," grinned Brick.

"YOU fellers just about raised —— and put a chunk under it."

Lafe Freeman leaned against the bunk-house door and contemplated the three bunks, wherein three blanketed figures reposed in deep slumber. A protruding leg, bare to the knee, was all that would absolutely identify any of the three humps as being human.

One of the humps choked over a healthy snore and sat up, blinking at Lafe.

"Whatcha say?"

Lafe Freeman squinted at Silent's yawning face and repeated his statement. Silent reached down, picked up a boot and hit the nearest figure a resounding whack.

"Daylight in the swamp!" he yelled. "Up and at 'em, Brick!"

Brick uncoiled from his blanket, swung his feet around and sprang for Silent, but Silent was looking for just such a move. His legs shot out, catching Brick in the chest, and the luckless Brick sprawled to the floor.

"Take him off!" yelled Silent, as if Brick were beating him. "Take him off!"

Then he threw the other boot, which hit Harp as he lifted up to see what the commotion was all about.

"Aw-w-w-w!" wailed Silent. "Brick's to blame, Harp. Honest to grandma, he is. I meant to hit him and he ducked."

Harp rubbed his shoulder and stared at Lafe. Brick got to his feet and sat down on his bunk.

"The sheriff," stated Lafe ominously, "the sheriff says that Marlin City ain't big enough to hold you fellers."

"Oh!"

Brick seemed surprized. Then he grinned.

"Goin' to build her bigger, eh?"

"Says he's got enough evidence to hold yuh all in jail."

"He needs stren'th more than evidence," yawned Harp.

"Well, he can make a lot of trouble for yuh, that's one cinch. He's got warrants all made out, so Le Blanc told me, and he's goin' to serve 'em the first time yuh show up down there."

"Warrants!"

Brick was properly indignant.

"I suppose we staged that runaway and grabbed the strong-box! Rats! The fellers that done it are the same ones that killed poor old Limpy."

"That's what they're talkin' about," nodded Lafe. "They say he rode away with you fellers, and that's the last time anybody seen him alive. There's talk that this robbery was all framed, and that Limpy was killed for his share because they was afraid he might get caught and squeal."

Brick stared at the floor, deep in thought.

"Mebbe they're right at that, Lafe."

"Betcha forty dollars they are," agreed Silent.

"Know anythin' about that new feller that bought the old Weepin' Tree ranch?"

The three cowboys looked at Lafe, but none of them admitted that they did, so Lafe continued:

"His daughter—I reckon it's his daughter—was in Marlin last night. Came in after grub, I reckon. After she went away I heard Cleeve talkin' to Bunty about her. Cleeve opines that they're kinda mysterious, and then he asks Bunty what he thinks about your story about the female bandit. Bunty said it was a —— of a thing for a

feller to imagine, and wondered if you fellers lied.

"Cale Wesson said it was a shame for a nice-lookin' girl to not have any females to wau-wau with, and he said he was goin' to have Mrs. Wesson go out and visit her."

"My ——!" gasped Brick. "Mrs. Wesson would talk the ear off a mule. What else did they say—Bunty and Cleeve?"

"Nothin' much. I hears Cleeve asked Bunty why he didn't go out to the Nine Bar Nine and serve them warrants instead of waitin' for you to come to town, and Bunty said there wasn't no —— of a big hurry about it."

"Bunty ain't goin' to strain himself and get his muscles all sore," observed Silent. "I ain't huntin' for trouble, but Marlin City is big enough to suit me."

"All right, all right!"

Lafe Freeman shook his head violently.

"Go ahead! Git in jail and see if I care; but before yuh get shot or hung I want you and Harp to go over to the Triangle Dot and bring back them twelve white-faced yearlin's. Sam Slayton said he'd have 'em in the corral;" and then added as an afterthought, "They're wilder than white-tail deer, but that ain't no reason for runnin' 'em all the way home."

Silent and Harp grumbled, which is a usual thing in a case of this kind, especially as they were afraid that Brick wouldn't sit down and wait for them to return. After breakfast they rode away, still grumbling.

Brick watched them disappear over the hills and then threw the saddle on his top horse, Glory, a hammer-headed gray. He filled half of his pistol-belt with rifle-cartridges and shoved a Winchester carbine into a saddle scabbard.

Lafe Freeman watched Brick's preparations, but made no comment. If Brick wanted to go to Marlin City and call the sheriff's bluff it was Brick's own business. Lafe knew that Brick could take care of himself, in spite of the fact that he was prone to get reckless. Lafe's soul yearned to follow Brick, but he put away his desires.

But Brick was not thinking about going to Marlin City to call Bunty Blair's bluff. Brick had an idea; an idea that was not at all clear just yet. Something seemed to tell him that the answer was written in the cañon where the hold-up had been pulled off. He was piecing together some of the things that had happened; but there were many, many things that he needed to make it complete.

As he swung away from the ranch, with the Winchester under his right knee, he wondered where the trail would end, and why he was so interested. It was not because Bunty Blair had hinted that he—Brick—was mixed up in it.

Brick's thoughts went to the Weeping Tree ranch. Was the answer there? He knew that Jean was not guilty. What did Scott Martin know? Would any man carry a note like that to the scene of the hold-up and take a chance on losing it? Brick shook his head.

Why was Limpy killed? Did Limpy know who held him up? Where was Limpy going when he was killed? Was he afraid that his knowledge of the bandits— Again Brick shook his head, but would not admit to himself that he was baffled. He would work on the theory that Limpy knew who held him up.

King Cleeve had incurred the displeasure of a mob, according to Silent's story. Martin led that mob. Why hadn't Martin recognized Cleeve? Did Cleeve know Martin? Brick scowled over these perplexing questions.

He went slowly down to the county road, and drifted along until he came to the second curve of the Whisperin' Creek grade, where he stopped. The wrecked stage had been taken away, and there was nothing left to mark the spot except the deep ruts where the wheels had cut into the soft hillside.

Brick visualized as much as he could of the robbery, but there was nothing to give him any clue. He decided that the woman, and possibly one of the men, had jumped or been knocked off the grade into the brush out of sight. The other had stayed with the stage until it reached the pine thicket. But their manner of escape from the crash had nothing to do with their apprehension.

Brick swung his horse off the edge of the grade and rode down to where the bank broke sharp to Whisperin' Creek, where he dismounted.

Brick felt sure that the bandits would not carry that heavy box very far. The reasonable thing, he thought, would be to open it, divide the contents and then go on. There was little water in the creek-bed, which was piled high with boulders.

Brick slid down to the creek-bed and began casting around. About fifty feet from where he struck the creek he found footprints of three people—two men and a woman. The half-wet sand had caught and held the prints perfectly.

"Men wearin' about number nines," muttered Brick.

Half the men in the country wore about that size boot. The woman wore what Brick would designate as a fair average size.

The tracks led across a sandy spot, all three prints well defined, especially those of the woman, whose heels made small circles. The tracks all led to a rock, which jutted up in the center of the sand-plot. The marks showed that the three had stopped for consultation or to wait for some one.

Brick studied the jumble of prints as he started to light a cigaret. Suddenly he stared at the tracks, while the match burned up and scorched his thumb. He dropped the match, circled the tracks and sprang to the top of the rock, where he perched like a buzzard, staring down at the sand.

The woman had walked to the rock, but had never walked away! Her footprints came up to the rock, but none went away. A jumble of men's tracks led to the opposite side of the ravine, but there was no sign of a woman's tracks.

Brick lighted his cigaret and pondered over this.

"My ——!" he exclaimed to himself. "She must 'a' just e-vaporated."

He studied it from every angle, but shook his head. Then he walked over to a big boulder, which he climbed, and looked around. He happened to glance down the far side of the big boulder, and there he saw the iron treasure-box, half-covered with brush.

Brick lost no time in getting down to it. The padlocks had been forced; one of them still dangled from the staple. Brick lifted the lid and stared down at a jumble of black cloth, which resolved itself into three black masks. Brick shook them out and then looked down at the untouched contents of the box—untouched except for examination.

Brick dropped on his knees beside it and lifted one of the heavy bars, weighing it in his hands. Then Brick closed the box carefully and examined the masks.

They were made of cheap material—sack-like affairs, with rough circles cut for eye-holes. An examination proved to Brick that they were not all made by the same person, as the sewing was crude, each one a different stitch and with different-colored thread.

He started to put them back into the box, but changed his mind and placed them, folded, inside his shirt. Then he piled more brush on the box, climbed back across the ravine and went back to his horse.

"Glory," he confided to the gray, "I've found out more in ten minutes than all the rest have since the hold-up, and—and I don't know a danged thing, yet. That's the —— of bein' a detective."

Brick did not stop in Marlin City; neither did he hurry through. The main street was not over three blocks long, and Brick walked his horse the full length of town, looking neither to the right nor left but seeing everything. Several cowboys in front of the Dollar Down looked expectantly at Brick, and voiced their disappointment when he passed the hitch-rack.

Three Star Hennessey saw Brick ride through town. Three Star was strong for self-preservation, so kept right on reading a year-old magazine. Bunty had boasted that he was going to arrest Brick as soon as he came into town, but that was all right with Three Star. He had made no boasts.

Le Blanc was fitting a hot shoe on a mule when Brick rode past, but the Frenchman forgot business long enough to go outside. The shoe was cold when Le Blanc came back in, and he swore fluently at the mule.

"Ba gar—" Le Blanc got confidential with the mule as soon as his disappointment was past—"ba gar, dis Breek she's ain't afraid for scare, an' I'm wonder why she don't stop. I'm mak' you little bet dat pretty soon dere be gut for de bear to chew. She's ride wit' Winchester under her leg. Somet'ing be do pretty soon, you bet me."

Topaz Tyler saw Brick, too. Bunty Blair was sleeping after a hard night at poker, but it did not take him long to wake up when Topaz sent a swamper from the saloon to tell him about Brick Davidson.

Bunty conferred with Three Star. They went over to the saloon, where Brick Davidson was the topic of conversation. King Cleeve grinned at Bunty, and Bunty grew explosive.

"He walked his horse through town," King informed Topaz.

Bunty wondered aloud where Brick could have been going alone. King Cleeve settled that wonder by saying—

"Isn't there a lady out at the Weeping Tree ranch?"

Bunty nodded, and exulted to himself. If there was a woman mixed up in this hold-up, why couldn't it be—? Bunty smiled. At least it meant that Brick was alone.

Of course, Brick alone was enough to make trouble, but Brick alone was not as formidable as Brick and Silent and Harp. Bunty announced that he would attend to Mr. Davidson at once.

Three Star was inclined to be pessimistic.

"Packin' a Winchester. I seen him shoot the tin can off a dog's tail oncet, and that dog was fannin' the breeze."

"Accident," said Topaz.

"Mebbyso."

Three Star was unconvinced.

"Mebbe she was a accident, but that didn't save the can, and yuh can't never make me believe that accidents are all through happenin'."

"This time," stated Bunty, "there won't be no accidents."

"Gee cripes!" grunted Three Star. "I didn't say it was a accident, did I? I hope there won't be no intentionals either."

BRICK knew that his ride through Marlin City had caused comment, but nothing more. Bunty and Three Star were the least of his troubles, and the fact of the warrants did not disturb him, as he felt that he could clear himself before any jury in Sun-Dog County.

He rode straight to the Weeping Tree ranch-house and swung off his horse near the doorway. As he started for the open door Scott Martin confronted him, and Brick stopped.

Martin had stopped with his weight resting on his right leg, his body swung a trifle forward and his right hand hanging loosely at his side. Brick recognized the pose; knew that Scott Martin was one of the old school of gun-fighters, and that right now he was in position for fast work.

There was nothing friendly-looking about Scott Martin. His face was set in stern lines, his eyes coldly blue, and his lower jaw seemed molded to a fighting angle. Brick wondered if this man ever smiled. Scott Martin gave one the impression of implacable power—power of purpose and physique. He did not speak, but his eyes seemed to challenge Brick.

"You're wrong, pardner. You don't know me, but I bring a pipe."

"Injun talk?"

Martin's tone was colorless.

"Y'betcha. White belts, pardner."

Martin relaxed easily, but before he could reply Jean came to the door and saw Brick.

"Hello there!" she called, and her voice was friendly.

"Howdy, ma'am," grinned Brick. "Nice day."

Martin glanced from Brick to Jean.

"Dad, shake hands with Mr. Davidson. He's the man who fixed that pipe for me."

"Oh!"

Martin smiled and shook hands with Brick, who withdrew his hand as quickly as possible. Brick's hands were muscular and tough, but Martin's grip was like that of a steel vise.

"Pardner, I hope yuh never take hold of me for anythin' but a handshake."

Brick flexed his fingers painfully as they went into the house.

Jean had done wonders with the living-room of the old ranch-house. Dainty curtains hung at the windows, a canary sang from a home-made cage against the wall, and the whole room glowed with cleanliness and cheer. An oblong piece of bright-colored rag carpet covered the center of the floor. On a little table was a jumble of colored cloth, on top of which was a fancy sewing-basket.

Brick examined the curtains, paying close attention to the sewing.

"Did yuh make all these things?" he asked.

"Yes. Are you interested in sewing?"

Jean's eyes danced.

"Kinda," admitted Brick, smiling at her. "I — I kinda wanted to see how yuh sewed."

"Going to turn seamstress?"

Brick colored and shook his head.

"No, ma'am."

"What's the idea?"

There was a trace of suspicion in Martin's voice.

Brick walked over to Martin.

"Pardner, I don't exactly *sabe* the idea myself. Yuh don't have to answer no questions, y' understand, and I don't want

yuh to get sore at my conversation. I want yuh both to look at this thing like I do. Spread your cards if yuh want to, or keep 'em face down. I'm spreadin' mine."

"There's a warrant out for me and Silent Slade for robbin' the stage of a box of gold on July 15th. There was a woman mixed up in it."

Brick had watched Martin's face, but it never changed a line. Jean looked only mildly curious. Brick continued:

"They're talkin' about you folks down in Marlin. I found this in the dust where the stage was robbed."

Brick handed the note to Scott Martin. Martin glanced at his own name on the dirty envelope and looked searchingly at Brick's face. He slowly took out the note and looked down at it.

Brick could see Martin's face lose its ruddy hue and grow blue—like taking hot steel from a forge and plunging it into cold water. Martin handed the note to Jean and the two men watched her read.

"What—where did you——"

Martin put his hand on her arm.

"Let him do the talkin', girl."

"There's three of us that have seen the note—me and Silent and Harp, ma'am. It looked kinda bad. Of course we didn't know your initial was J, and we didn't know yuh had a man by the name of Oliver workin' for yuh."

"Jack isn't here yet," said Jean. "He stopped——"

"What do you think?"

Martin's tone was very cool.

"I've been doin' a lot of thinkin'," grinned Brick, "but it ain't got me much. There's somethin' crooked, pardner. The evidence against yuh is—too—danged—good. If yuh know anythin'——"

Brick reached inside his bosom and drew out the three masks.

"I found these today. They— Look at the sewin', will yuh, ma'am? It sure don't resemble your work a-tall."

Jean picked up one of the masks, while Martin held the other two in his hands, watching her.

Came a sound at the door, and they turned to look into muzzles of two rifles, held in the hands of Bunty Blair and Three Star Hennessey. For a moment there was silence, and then Bunty Blair laughed aloud.

"Don't move your hands," he cautioned; and then his eyes caught the significance of the black cloths.

IT WAS a very inopportune time for the three people, each holding an incriminating mask. Circumstantial evidence, it is true, but evidence that no jury would overlook. Brick realized their danger, and his mind worked fast.

Bunty chuckled and Three Star grinned.

"Caught with the goods," said Bunty, relishing his own words. "Gettin' all ready for another job, eh? Kinda lucky, I am."

There was not a ghost of a chance for anything except surrender. Scott Martin looked at Brick, and the friendliness had all left his eyes. His look was an accusation. Brick glanced at Jean, but she was looking down at the table-top, looking at one of the masks. Her face was white and her lips tightly compressed. None of them had put up their hands.

Bunty gloated. It was his moment and he was going to enjoy it.

"Unbuckle your belts," he ordered. "Careful with your hands. Now, hand 'em to me."

Bunty stepped inside, holding his cocked rifle at his hip, while Three Star covered them from just outside the door. Brick slowly unbuckled his belt.

Scott Martin was holding out his belt, but Bunty was watching Brick, and did not take it. Bunty was afraid of a trick.

Brick held out his belt and gun, but before Bunty could take it he let it fall to the rag carpet. Bunty stepped forward as if to pick it up, but changed his mind.

"No, yuh don't, Davidson."

Bunty was determined to take no chances.

"Pick it up yourself. You can't fox me this time."

Brick grinned at Bunty as if in appreciation of Bunty's caution; but he was in reality grinning at his own cleverness. Bunty had been foxed, but did not know it. It was a desperate chance, but Brick delighted in taking chances.

He half-knelt to pick up the belt and gun, but his hands grasped the rag carpet instead; and with a sudden backward heave he yanked the carpet from under Bunty's feet, throwing him upside down.

As Bunty fell Brick threw himself forward and into Bunty, and they rolled almost into the startled Three Star, who was unable to shoot for fear of hitting Bunty.

With a twist of his body Brick crashed Bunty against the side of the door, where he plucked Bunty's pistol from its holster and sent a bullet so close to Three Star's ear that Three Star lowered his rifle and felt to see whether he had lost an ear or not.

Scott Martin had snatched his own pistol from its holster and was covering Three Star, who capitulated audibly. Bunty's head had hit the wall so hard that he had little interest in present conditions.

"I told him," wailed Three Star. "I told him."

"What did yuh tell him?" asked Brick.

"I told him to wire the governor to send out a troop of cavalry. I ain't got a danged thing against yuh, Davidson."

"Workin' under protest?"

"Yeah. Soon as he wakes up I'm goin' to resign. I'll take my forty a month and punch cows."

Bunty took plenty of time to wake up, but awoke audibly. His feelings were hurt, and he felt it entirely within his rights to give vent to his feelings in profanity; but Brick promptly gagged him with a handkerchief, much to Bunty's indignation and disgust. The handkerchief was none too clean.

It had all happened in less time than it takes to tell about it. Martin had buckled his belt on again, and now he handed Brick's gun and belt to him.

"That was what a Frenchman would call a 'fox pass,'" grinned Brick. "Them darned masks made things look kinda bad for us; eh?"

Bunty gargled something, but Brick gave him a withering look and his eyes dropped to sullen contemplation of his toes. Three Star shifted his feet nervously.

"I—I don't understand."

Jean shook her head.

"Neither do I," admitted Brick, "but I'm havin' a lot of fun in my ignorance."

"You knowed Bunty had a warrant for yuh, didn't yuh?" asked Three Star.

Brick nodded. He turned to Martin.

"Do yuh know King Cleeve?"

Martin shook his head.

"No, only by sight."

Brick wrinkled his brow and wondered if Silent had been mistaken.

"You used to live in Idaho?"

"Yes; we came here from Idaho."

Brick stepped against the building, where he could keep an eye on Three Star and Bunty. Then he said to Martin:

"About eight or ten years ago you almost lynched the wrong man. Do yuh remember it, Martin?"

Martin's eyes grew wider and wider until they were almost complete circles; then they snapped back to mere slits, venomous as the eyes of a rattlesnake. The lines of his face stiffened into a mask and his body seemed to lengthen until the shoulder seams of his shirt threatened to snap under the strain. His lips did not seem to move as he breathed:

"Davidson, who are you? For ——'s sake, say something!"

Brick glanced at Jean. She was leaning forward, looking at Martin, her hand raised as if to reach for his arm. Brick snapped a glance at Three Star and Bunty.

"Can't yuh talk?" gritted Martin.

Brick stooped and picked up a coiled rope beside the door-step, and turned to Martin.

"We'll tie up our visitors, pardner; then talk."

Martin relaxed and stepped forward.

"You'll pay for this!" snarled Bunty as the gag slipped from his mouth. "You can't tie up the sheriff——"

"Mebbe not," replied Brick, "but we'll do our little best. There's worse places for a rope than around your hands and feet. You don't mind, do yuh, Three Star?"

"Nawsir. Help yourself, Brick."

Martin opened the door and they put the trussed officers into the next room, which was unused. Bunty made many rash promises, but no one seemed interested.

Back in the living-room Martin faced Brick, and Brick noticed that Martin had aged years in the last few minutes. His eyes had lost their glare, and his hand trembled as he drew it across his eyes.

"Davidson, if you know—anything—let me—give me a chance, will yuh?"

Martin's voice was pleading, and Brick wondered at the change.

"Pardner, I ain't goin' to cheat yuh out of anythin'. I don't know much—yet. Will yuh tell me a few things? Mebbe what I know will fit in with yours."

Martin nodded.

"I'll tell all I can, Davidson."

"Who did juh buy this ranch from?"

"A man by the name of Mohr."

"Zell Mohr?"

"Yes."

"Whatcha know about that?"

Brick frowned down at the floor.

He had not known that Zell Mohr had owned the Weeping Tree.

"Suppose yuh tell me about that night in Idaho," Brick suggested.

Martin looked at Jean and then walked over by the open door, where he leaned against the side and looked off across the hills. Jean stepped in closer to Brick, but neither of them spoke. Finally Martin turned and came back.

"Davidson, I reckon you're a square-shooter. I thought—when the sheriff showed up—us havin' those masks——"

"Did look bad," smiled Brick; "but mebbe we can spoil the looks of it. Go ahead."

"Davidson, I used to be an outlaw."

If Martin expected Brick to show surprize he was disappointed.

"Did yuh ever hear of the Sandy Creek gang?"

BRICK nodded. The fame, or rather infamy, of the Sandy Creek gang had never died out, although they had seemingly disbanded eight or ten years before. None of them had ever been brought to justice.

"I was the leader of that gang," said Martin slowly. "For two years I rode at the head of that outlaw clan, and then I met the woman I married.

"Jean is not my daughter. Her mother was a widow, and Jean was ten years old when I met her. Men said that Mary Magone was beautiful. Women were scarce in that country—good women; and God never made a better one, Davidson.

"I rode into Cottonwood one day and met her. Two weeks later we were married and I left the old gang. Mary never knew I was an outlaw. She wasn't the kind you could tell things like that to—and the Sandy Creek gang had been accused of a lot of devilish things they never did. I knew she could never understand, so I did not tell.

"Our game was to take the clean-ups of the mines. We had information on every ounce of gold, and very little of it ever got past us.

"I had a little saved up. I told Mary I had sold my cattle. We moved away from there. I was a gambler, Davidson, and my money did not last. I had to get a job, and of all the jobs on earth for me to take—I went to drivin' the stage between Sweetgrass and the Ophir mines.

"Davidson, I was happy. I had a little home, the sweetest wife on earth, and little Jean. The past kinda faded out, and it seemed like I had always been straight. There was a reward of five thousand dollars for the leader of the Sandy Creek gang.

"I heard a feller say once that there's only the thickness of a cigaret paper between heaven and hell. He was right. I walked out of heaven one day when I met 'Black' Ames and Pete Rawls, members of the old gang.

"They laughed at me when I told 'em I was livin' straight. Rawls said they were going to get their share of the gold from the Ophir mines and were willin' to split it three ways with me.

"I refused to listen to them. They laughed and went away.

"Two days later they came to me again. I refused to help them. They laughed at me. Wasn't there a fat reward for the leader of the old gang? Wouldn't folks like to know who was driving the Ophir stage?

"Then Ames sprung his hole-card by telling me that my wife would be glad to find me out.

"Davidson, I should have killed them both right there. It would have caused trouble, but would have been better. That night I heard two men, standing in the dark, talking. One of them was Ames, and he was saying:

" 'That's the idea. We'll put a note in his pocket to show who he is. Did yuh ever see his wife?'

"The other one said—

" 'You're danged right I have, and I'm thinkin' I'll see a lot more of her pretty soon.'

"I knew they were talking about me. After they were gone I had figured out what they meant. They were going to kill me at the hold-up. Somebody was going to find my body with the note on it and claim the reward. Somebody else was going to try to get my wife, Davidson.

"I think that Rawls and Ames were the ones who pulled off the dirty deals that were credited to the Sandy Creek gang. It was impossible to prove it at the time. They demanded that I tip 'em off to the next big shipment of gold.

"I didn't know what to do, Davidson. I finally decided to lie about a shipment and fight it out with them at the hold-up. I thought there might be a third man in the deal, on account of the conversation I had overheard, but I took a chance. I knew they were going to try and kill me, but they

didn't know that I knew this, which made it safer for me.

"I expected to have three men hold me up, but there were five of 'em. Ames and Rawls were not masked, but the other three were. They did not look for trouble from me, but when my hands came up I gave Ames and Rawls each a dozen buckshot from my shotgun. They never moved. They were going to double-cross me, but I beat 'em to it. Then a bullet struck me in the head, and when I fell I must 'a' kicked loose the brake and the team ran away.

"When I woke up I was in a saloon at Sweetgrass and the doctor was sewing up the gash in my head. A man had come to the door of the saloon and yelled that the stage had been smashed up and the driver killed. Then he rode away. They had brought me to town. It was dark. I went home. Yes, it was only a scalp wound, but I was bruised up pretty bad.

"I found the note in my pocket—the note that would tell folks who I had been. I destroyed it and went in the house. No one had told Mary, but she was worried because I was so late. I was tryin' to explain that I was all right, when the door opened and a masked man came in. Mary and I stood there together and looked at him. He said:

" 'We thought you was dead, Martin, but it don't matter. You double-crossed us today and you're goin' to pay.'

"All this time he's got a gun pointed at us. He whistled, and two more men came in.

" 'What do you want?' asked Mary, and the first man laughed.

" 'You,' he said. 'Pretty women are too scarce to waste on a dog like you've got.'

"I did not have a gun—nothing but my bare hands, but I sprang for him. I felt his bullet burn my cheek, and then there came a scream."

Martin's face was agonized and his hands clutched at the table-cover. Then he looked up at Brick, and his face was bloodless.

"Yes, that bullet killed her, Davidson—the bullet that was meant for me. Another shot at me as I caught my foot in the rug and fell. I guess they thought I was done for, so they left. The shots were heard and people came.

"Little Jean had come out from her bed and saw it all. I guess that saved me, because folks thought I had done it. I think I went crazy then.

"I got a gun and went hunting for the man who shot my wife. I think I just wanted to kill somebody. I had lost all that made life worth while, and I wanted to find something or somebody that would fight me.

"I knew that Ames and Rawls were dead, and I had no idea of who these three men could be. I didn't know but what it was my neighbor—anybody. I don't know how I expected to find 'em, but I went into the main street, looking.

"A horse had fallen in the street and hurt the rider. I met the sheriff, who was taking the injured man away. The sheriff looked like he had been fighting.

"I went to the saloon, where men shrank away from me. I don't blame them. I—I wanted to kill somebody.

"A man was telling about the horse falling. He said that there were two men. They raced into the street and one of the horses fell. I asked him who they were. He did not know.

"Then I knew it was one of the men who killed my wife. I told them. We went to the jail and took him out. I wanted them to let me have him, but they wanted to hang him. I think I tied the knot. For some reason or other I lit a match and looked at him.

"It was the wrong man. This man was over six feet tall and had no marks of injury. I think he was half-drunk. We left him and went back, but our man was gone. We found the sheriff at his shack, but he knew nothing.

"Since then we've kinda moved around, Jean and I. Something seems to tell me that some day I'll find that man. Something will tell me who he is when we meet."

Martin finished his tale and put his arms around Jean.

"What was the sheriff's name, Martin?"

"Zell Mohr. He always was sorry for me, and tried to make me give up the idea of hunting for that man. I reckon he felt sorry for Jean, 'cause I kinda was unsatisfied in any one place, and when he got this old ranch he wrote me to come out here."

Brick stared at the floor. If Zell Mohr had been the sheriff, why hadn't Silent recognized him?

"Does Zell Mohr look the same as he did then?"

"Well, mebbe a little older, but——"

"He doesn't wear a beard any more, daddy," said Jean.

"That's right, girl. He did used to wear whiskers."

Brick rolled a cigaret slowly, and then looked up with a smile.

"Martin, did yuh ever see a hound catch a coyote?"

Martin frowned over the seemingly irrelevant question.

"Why, I—uh—yes, I have."

"Could three greyhounds catch a coyote and not get cut up a bit?"

Martin smiled and shook his head.

"No, I don't reckon they could, but they might."

"Could three greyhounds catch four coyotes on the same day and not show a mark?"

"No!"

Martin's reply was very decisive.

"The coyote would cut some of them, that's a cinch."

"What have hounds and coyotes to do with it?" asked Jean.

"I dunno," admitted Brick; "but somethin', I think. Did yuh ever know a crippled feller by the name of Limpy Squires?"

Martin stared at Brick.

"Limpy Squires? Where is he?"

"He's dead. He was drivin' the stage that got held up, and later on he starts out with a ridin'-horse and pack-animal, and somebody plugged him in the back."

Martin stared down at the floor and his lips twitched.

"The fellers that robbed that stage likely killed him," said Brick.

Martin looked up.

"Limpy Squires was my best friend, Davidson, but I did not know he was in this country. He was one of the old gang, and got his limp when he stepped between me and a bullet from one of our own gang. He had to quit the gang on account of that injury. But why did anybody kill him?"

"Mebbe," suggested Brick, "mebbe somebody was afraid you two might meet."

Martin leaned closer to Brick and his voice was tense.

"Do you think that some of the gang—somebody wanted to get me? Did they plant that note—and they killed Limpy?"

"Looks kinda like it," nodded Brick; and then he told Martin of what happened at the hold-up, the finding of the note, and of the baffling footprints.

"What I want to know is this; where did that woman go? She didn't jist evaporate."

Martin shook his head and glanced at the connecting door between the living-room and the empty room where the prisoners had been placed.

"Can they hear, do yuh think?" asked Brick.

Jean walked across the room and opened the door. She glanced inside and turned quickly.

"They're gone!" she exclaimed.

Brick sprang across to the door and looked inside. On the floor were Three Star's hat and several pieces of cut rope.

"Kinda complicates things, pardner," observed Brick soberly. "Wonder how much they heard?"

"Too much, if anything," replied Martin. "What will we do now?"

"Meet 'em half-way," grinned Brick, going to the door.

At the corner was Bunty's horse and buggy, and coming around that was another horse and buggy. On the seat was a tall, raw-boned woman, handling the lines like a veteran. She jumped out and tied her horse and came toward the door.

"Howdy, Mrs. Wesson," greeted Brick.

"Well, well, if it ain't ol' man Davidson's prodigal son!"

Mrs. Wesson threw back her head and laughed.

"Well, Brickie, ain't yuh goin' to introduce me? Where's your manners?"

Brick managed to introduce her to Jean and Martin. Mrs. Wesson beamed upon Jean and patted her shoulder.

"Honey, I jist found out that there was a girl at the old Weepin' Tree. Cale Wesson has knowed it several days, but he ain't never told me. I gave him —— for it, too, and you know what he said? He said I'd talk the limb off a yucca-tree, and he was sparin' yuh. Ha, ha, ha! I told him I had the closest tongue in the world, and he said, 'Yes—closes' to words.'

"Ain't men the dangdest things? Look at Brick Davidson, will yuh? Wild-ridin', good-for-nothin' cowpuncher, but some day some girl will up and marry him. Fact. Oh, I've seen girls make some awful mistakes.

"Brick's handsome—I'll say that much for him; but, honey, them handsome men don't always provide hot cakes for your breakfast. But Brick won't cuss a woman. I hate a man who cusses at women. I'm goin' to bend a gun over Bunty Blair's head some of these bright afternoons, y'betcha.

"Met him and Three Star Hennessey about half-way between here and town. Walkin'. Fact. I stops and says—

" 'If you're just exercisin' I'll give yuh a lift up the road a piece and let yuh get a fresh start.'

"Know what Bunty said? He told me to go somewhere. I told him that the chairs was all reserved for sheriffs, and I'll be danged if I'd stand up. Ha, ha, ha! Three Star ain't so bad, but he's in bad company. Talkin' about standin' up reminds me of—Honey, let's go in out of the sun."

Jean led Mrs. Wesson inside, where she immediately began another discourse, breaking off to eulogize Jean's taste in room decoration.

"Get your bronc," said Brick. "Let her entertain Jean. I think that me and you have got a job ahead of us."

Martin nodded and listened to Mrs. Wesson talking.

"She's the goods, Davidson. Rough as a file, but I'll bet she's got a solid-gold heart. Put overalls and boots on her and she'd look just like a man."

Brick looked at Martin and then stared at his horse. He visualized Mrs. Wesson in male garb, and a smile crossed his face. He started to put his foot in the stirrup, but stopped. Then he turned to Martin, who was putting a saddle on a tall star-faced bay.

"Say, pardner, that woman didn't neither fly nor evaporate."

Martin turned.

"Where did she go, Davidson?"

"Walked away with the men."

"I thought yuh said she never left the rock."

"I was locc."

"How did she leave?"

Brick swung into his saddle and adjusted himself before replying—

"Walked away on her two feet."

Martin tied off his cinch and swung into his saddle.

"Reckon we ought to take the sheriff's rig back to town with us?"

Brick shook his head, and they circled the ranch-house, headed for Marlin City.

IT WAS a long, hot walk for Bunty and Three Star. Bunty had managed to work one hand loose and secure his knife, and the rest had been easy.

They would have had to pass the open door of the living-room to reach their rig, and if they circled the house to reach the other side they might be seen or heard. Three Star advised extreme caution, and Bunty was willing to accept the advice.

Bunty was sore, but Three Star was indifferent. Bunty swore he was going to get a posse and go right back. Three Star wished him the best of luck, and his well wishes nettled Bunty.

"Quittin', are yuh?" snarled Bunty.

"Not quittin'—quit," corrected Three Star.

"You ain't got no guts," declared Bunty. "Let 'em treat yuh thataway and then quit."

"I didn't 'let' 'em," said Three Star, "and yuh can take it from me, they ain't going to get another chance. Next time they'll likely take your little knife and make yuh swaller it. As far as Brick Davidson is concerned—I pass."

The spectacle of the sheriff and deputy walking into town excited amusement and interest. Several cowboys were in front of the Dollar Down, and they lost no time in making an audible demonstration.

Sitting in front of Wesson's store were Silent and Harp, the latter dealing out mournful music, while Silent sang softly and very much off the key.

"Looky!" grunted Harp, pointing up the street. "Bunty and Three Star hammerin' their own hocks."

"Whatcha know?" wondered Silent.

"Mebbe they know where Brick is—the danged red-headed son of a gun."

Bunty and Three Star went straight for the saloon. Silent and Harp went across the street, arriving there just in time to hear Bunty say—

"How many of you fellers want to get in on a reward?"

Cowboys as a rule are skeptical of such an invitation.

Zell Mohr came out of the saloon and walked up to the crowd. Bunty glanced around expectantly, but none of the cowboys seemed to consider his invitation.

"I reckon I've got to deputize some of yuh," stated Bunty.

"Did yuh lose your horse and buggy?" asked Silent.

"How much reward for gettin' it back?" asked Bill See, a Triangle Dot puncher.

Bunty glared at Silent, but did not speak.

"What's the trouble, Bunty?" asked Mohr.

King Cleeve, attracted by the crowd outside, had left his game and come out. Bunty saw Cleeve and turned to him.

"I've found the road-agents," stated Bunty. "Discovered 'em with the masks in their possession."

"Discovered is right," grinned Three Star. "Bunty talked so much that they had to muzzle him."

Three Star laughed and looked at Zell Mohr.

"Friends of yours, Mohr. At least, they spoke about you."

"Who yuh talkin' about?" growled Mohr.

"Brick Davidson and that Martin person," replied Bunty. "Them two and the woman are the ones what robbed the stage."

Silent elbowed his way to Bunty's side.

"Don't let your cinch slip too much, Bunty."

Bunty looked around at the circle of faces, but there was only curiosity.

"I've got a dead immortal cinch on them," stated Bunty. "They got the drop on me and Three Star, but we got away. Now I want help to go and get 'em."

"Me and Harp will help yuh," said Silent.

Topaz Tyler added his gaudy presence to the assemblage, stepping easily that he might not soil his polished boots.

"Take Topaz," grinned Silent. "He'll dazzle 'em and then yuh can hit 'em from behind."

Bunty glared at Silent.

"Kinda lookin' for trouble, ain't yuh, Slade?"

"Well," grinned Silent, "I ain't packin' no extra spokes for fear I might get a wheel smashed."

Bunty whirled as the crowd laughed, and went straight for his office. The sheriff of Sun-Dog was disgusted and tired. Three Star started to follow him, but stopped.

"Forgot I resigned."

Three Star removed the badge of office from the lapel of his vest and sent it spinning across the street.

King Cleve watched Three Star shed his authority, and as the crowd drifted back into the saloon he stepped in close to Three Star and said—

"What happened out there?"

"Just what I expected," said Three Star. "Brick Davidson made a pair of monkeys out of me and Bunty. They tied us up, but Bunty got his knife and cut us loose."

"What did they talk about?"

"I dunno—much."

Three Star shook his head seriously.

"I didn't *sabe* much they said, but I'm bettin' that between them two—Brick and Martin—there's goin' to be —— turned loose in somebody's wickiup."

"Threats?"

"Nawsir. I heard yours and Mohr's name mentioned."

Three Star started to go inside, but Cleeve took hold of his sleeve.

"I'll make it worth your while to remember what they said."

Three Star scratched his chin and then shook his head.

"Nope. I'm all through buttin' into Brick Davidson's business; and besides I'm gettin' so I like the —— fool."

Mohr was standing beside the door, and he gave Three Star a searching glance as he passed. Cleeve went slowly in behind Three Star, and he and Mohr exchanged glances, but neither of them spoke. Mohr started as if to go to the hitch-rack, but changed his mind and went inside the saloon.

Bunty Blair was mad at the world in general and Brick Davidson and Scott Martin in particular. Here was a chance for him to land two men, whom he believed guilty of robbery, and to satisfy his revengeful nature at the same time.

Bunty was merely incapable as a peace officer. Bunty knew this—knew it too well for his own conscience. He knew that Brick Davidson thought him a joke, and it cut deep into Bunty's tender feelings. Perhaps other men thought the same as Brick, but they concealed their feelings.

Bunty slapped his hat on the table. He lifted it up and slapped it down again. At least neither the table nor the hat would fight back, and Bunty needed a safety-valve.

He glowered down at the hat as if it were no inanimate mass of battered felt, and then walked over to the door. To go after Brick and Martin single-handed was suicide; to ignore their actions meant ridicule from the whole county.

Bunty glanced up the street, and his body stiffened. Coming into the upper end of town was Brick Davidson on his hammer-headed gray, and beside him was Scott Martin, on a tall bay.

Bunty gasped. Of all the unadulterated nerve! Coming right into Marlin City! Suddenly Bunty laughed aloud; but his laugh contained little mirth. Brick and Martin must have thought that he and Three Star were still safely roped in that room.

Bunty watched them ride up to the hitch-rack, and then he sat down in a chair to think. His first thought was a glad one—glad that he was not in the saloon.

BRICK and Scott Martin had ridden the whole distance from the ranch-house in silence. Martin did not know what Brick was going to do in Marlin City, and Brick did not enlighten him.

Martin studied Brick's set features and wondered what was to come next.

"Ridin' into a noose?" he mused to himself. "If the officers reached town and told their story, why hasn't a posse been organized? What has this red-headed spit-fire in his mind?"

But the red-head was silent until Marlin City was before them, and then he said:

"Pardner, there's goin' to be trouble, I reckon; but you let me start it, will yuh? Mebbe yuh won't *sabe* my talk, but don't let that worry yuh none. I'm goin' to force a showdown, and some folks are goin' to have some bad cards."

Martin nodded. He was pinning his faith to Brick Davidson.

They entered the saloon and walked up to the bar. Topaz Tyler was standing at the bar, talking with another man. King Cleeve, in shirt sleeves and eye-shade, was sitting in a lookout chair at the stud game, facing the bar. Beside him sat Zell Mohr, hat pulled low over his eyes, a substantial pile of blue chips in front of him.

Over at the roulette layout a half-drunken cowboy was trying to shake the attentions of a dance-hall girl long enough to see if his number won, while a couple of other cowboys urged the girl to get a rope and hog-tie the spendthrift.

The room hummed with voices, the rattle of chips, the clink of glassware, and above it all sounded the tin-panny rattle of a piano.

Brick and Scott Martin stopped mid-way of the bar and turned facing the center of the room. Their entrance had attracted no attention, and for a space of twenty seconds nobody noticed them.

Suddenly Zell Mohr glanced from under the low-pulled brim of his hat, straight at the two men. Mohr's eyes were shaded so it was impossible to see any change of expression, but his lips never moved.

"First king bets," intoned the dealer; but Zell Mohr made no move to bet.

"Passin', Zell?" asked one of the players; but still Mohr made no move to play.

King Cleeve looked down at Mohr, and then glanced over at the bar. Brick Davidson was looking straight at him. King Cleeve blinked perceptibly.

The dealer sensed the tension of Mohr and Cleeve, and looked over at the bar For perhaps ten seconds there was no change in the hum and rattle of the room, and then the noise died down—down—down, like the slowing of a big piece of machinery.

The bulk of the noise stopped; but here and there an extra word, the rattle of a dropped pocker-chip, the last flip notes from the piano, as if played with nervous fingers.

Then silence.

Topaz Tyler had half-lifted a glass of liquor to his lips, but his eyes shifted suddenly and the glass slipped from his fingers, rolled in a noisy circle on the bar and then fell to the floor.

Every eye in the place focused on Brick and Scott Martin.

Brick's eyes shifted to Topaz, who was half-turned away from the bar, and his voice was mildly humorous.

"Losin' your grip already, Topaz?"

Topaz did not reply. His hand started toward his face as if to wipe his lips, but halted short of his chin. He stopped in the attitude of either deep thought or total abstraction.

Brick's eyes flashed back to King Cleeve, but the humor had all gone from his eyes. Brick was deadly cool. His hands hung loosely at his sides, but his elbows were half-bent, and his feet were planted far apart as if to withstand a shock.

The bartender pussyfooted the length of the bar, getting out of line with Brick and the crowd. Brick's eyes flashed sidewise, and then a grin overspread his face. He appreciated the bartender's views on the matter.

The half-drunken cowboy started to say something, but another cowboy jerked his sleeve and clapped a hand over the inebriated one's mouth. Brick's eyes flashed

from face to face, and then he looked directly at Zell Mohr, while his hand brushed easily back and forth past the butt of his holstered gun.

"What kind of a rifle do you use, Mohr?"

Mohr stared at Brick for a moment.

"I shoot a .45-90, it it's any of your business, Davidson."

"Did yuh run out of shells the day of the hold-up?"

Mohr continued to gaze at Brick. Then he looked up at King Cleeve as if seeking an answer to a foolish question. Then he shook his head slowly.

"Then why did yuh use a .45-70 ca'tridge when yuh shot at Silent Slade, down there at the wrecked stage?"

Mohr leaned forward; a natural enough movement, but it gave him a chance to move his hands.

"Keep your elbows on the table!" snapped Brick.

Silent and Harp moved slowly away from the crowd, and were now standing nearer the door. Brick's eyes flashed toward them and then back at Mohr. Topaz Tyler still stood in the same position, but now his eyes were upon Cleeve and Mohr as if waiting their next move. Scott Martin was standing half-facing Topaz, wondering what was to come next.

"Yuh might answer my last question," said Brick easily.

"Who in —— do you think you are—the judge?" growled Mohr.

"Mebbe."

Brick leaned forward and snapped his next words:

"I ain't no lawyer, Zell Mohr, but I'm goin' to pass on your case right here and now! Set still!"

Brick's eyes shifted to Cleeve's set features, and then seemed to consider his next question.

"Cleeve, you're a man of intelligence, ain't yuh? No, yuh don't need to answer that. You and Zell Mohr was huntin' coyotes on the day the stage was robbed, wasn't yuh?"

Cleeve nodded and started to speak, but Brick continued:

"Zell Mohr's three greyhounds caught four coyotes for yuh that day. After the hounds caught them coyotes yuh had to shoot the coyotes, didn't yuh?"

Cleeve nodded.

"Yuh shot them coyotes with a .45-90, didn't yuh? Uh-huh. After them nice slick greyhounds caught the coyotes—you shot 'em."

"What are you—" began Cleeve; but Brick continued—

"As I said before, you're a man of intelligence, Cleeve; so I don't see why in —— yuh wanted to lie about them coyotes."

Cleeve leaned forward, and his long, tapering fingers seemed to clutch at the knees of his trousers.

Mohr leaned back and shifted his feet.

"Set still!" snapped Brick. "You ain't started to get tired yet."

"What's all this coyote talk about?" snarled Cleeve. "Nobody lied. The hounds caught the coyotes——"

"Yeah?"

Brick's tone was very sarcastic.

"Yuh say they did? Well, now, I'm wonderin', Cleeve. Them hounds were as fresh as the mornin' dew, and not one of 'em had a single scratch. Did yuh pull the coyotes' teeth before yuh sent the dogs after 'em?"

"What are you drivin' at?" asked Mohr.

"Drivin' at the fact that them coyotes was never caught by hounds."

"Suppose you want us to prove it to you," sneered Cleeve, relaxing and trying to force a smile.

Brick smiled back at him, but only with his lips. The crowd shifted uneasily. Topaz Tyler glanced at Brick and then back at Mohr and Cleeve.

"Cleeve," observed Brick, "yuh might like to know that I was cold sober to begin with on the day that you and Topaz Tyler got me drunk and stole that note out of my pocket. You thought I had the note you planted at the robbery, and I wanted to be sure that you wanted it bad enough to steal."

King Cleeve's eyes flashed to Topaz and then back at Brick. Scott Martin seemed to slide one foot forward as if getting set for a quick move.

"I don't know what you mean," breathed Cleeve.

"It's all rot!" snarled Mohr; but his face was green.

"Y'betcha it's rot!" exploded Brick. "As rotten a thing as I ever heard. Set still, Mohr!"

Silent and Harp had slowly moved closer. Three Star was standing at the edge of the crowd, but nearer the door, resting both

hands on the back of an empty chair.

"I'm goin' back quite a ways," began Brick as if telling a matter-of-fact story—"back to the time when Zell Mohr was a sheriff in Idaho. Remember it, don't yuh, Mohr? You ought to.

"Durin' that time an ex-outlaw was drivin' a stage. He had reformed and was goin' straight. Two of his old pals got in with three other men, and they framed this stage-driver. The scheme was to force him to tell them when a big shipment of gold was to be made. This was all they asked of him; but he overheard their plan to kill him. One of these polecats wanted this stage-driver's wife.

"The stage-driver didn't know there was more than these two men goin' to hold him up, y'understand. He was livin' straight, and he wanted to keep on livin' straight, but they wouldn't let him. He told 'em of a shipment comin' through—a shipment that existed only in his own mind. They held him up. He was lookin' for 'em, and he killed the two men who framed him. Remember it, Mohr?"

Mohr's lips did not move. Cleeve's hands had moved off his knees and were slightly twitching back along his thighs.

"Hands nervous, Cleeve?" asked Brick. "Have a little patience. These other three men shot this stage-driver and thought he was dead. There was no gold on the stage. But the driver wasn't dead, Mohr. Some folks went out and got him. He was hurt kinda bad, but managed to get home to his wife and little girl.

"These three men went to his house at night to take this man's wife, and they found him there—the man they thought they had killed. They told him they were going to take his wife, Mohr. Yes, they were goin' to take her, but he put up a fight. He didn't have no gun. One of 'em shot at him, and the bullet killed the woman."

Brick stopped talking. Scott Martin was leaning forward, his eyes searching the faces before him, while his powerful hands opened and shut as if hungering for something to crush. Cleeve's face had gone a shade paler, and his head seemed to droop lower between his hunched shoulders.

"I'm goin' to tell more," said Brick softly. "They shot at the stage-driver again and thought they had killed him, but were mistaken again.

"Then they pulled out—fast; that is, two of 'em did. A horse fell with one of 'em—fell in the street.

"Remember that, Mohr? You was the sheriff at that time. Do yuh remember takin' this man whose horse fell and puttin' him in jail? He was hurt, but you didn't take him to a doctor. No; you was afraid a doctor might ask questions, or somebody might."

Mohr licked his lips.

"I—I don't see——"

"Remember havin' a fight with a big, tall cowboy that day, Mohr? He licked yuh, but yuh got help and put him in jail. You only had one cell in that jail, and yuh had to put this injured man in with the big feller. You thought that the big feller was too drunk to pay any attention, didn't yuh?

"Remember the mob that went down there to lynch this feller whose horse fell with him? They knew he was one of the men who killed the woman. They got the wrong man, but they found it out before they lynched him, and when they came back the—murderer—was—gone. He never was tried, because you went there after the mob left—and—took—him—away."

THE crowd had hung upon every word, and now all eyes were turned toward Zell Mohr to see how he was going to take Brick's accusation. They knew that Zell Mohr was a gun-fighter.

Mohr licked his lips and tried to smile at Scott Martin. Then he looked at Brick.

"Why—uh—you're wrong, Davidson. Martin knows—why, I—I've been his friend——"

Mohr's voice was pitched very low, and men leaned forward to hear his words.

"I—I felt sorry for him."

"Did yuh?" grated Brick. "Yuh did—felt sorry for him, like a buzzard feels sorry for a sick calf."

"What does all this talk mean?" asked Topaz Tyler slowly.

Brick's eyes shifted, and Topaz glanced down at his feet, seemingly sorry that he spoke. Brick glanced down at Topaz' feet.

"Yuh got small feet, Topaz," he observed, keeping his eyes on Mohr and Cleeve but watching Topaz out of the corner of one eye. "Small feet and small hands. A skirt and a veil is about all yuh need to make you a perfect lady."

Topaz lifted his head and looked directly

at Cleeve; but Cleeve seemed to evade his eyes.

"Speakin' of shoes," said Brick, "you changed yours in a bad place, Topaz. Why didn't yuh keep on them high-heels until yuh got out of the sand?"

Topaz seemed to stiffen at the question.

"That cut yuh got on your forearm when the stage was upset never did heal good; did it, Topaz?"

Like a flash Topaz lifted his arm and glanced down at it.

Brick's sudden question had taken Topaz off his guard, and he had trapped himself. Topaz realized it, and his eyes shifted like the eyes of a trapped animal, but he was afraid of the consequences of any sudden break.

Brick smiled and began:

"Cleeve, you and Mohr and Tyler waited a long time to get even with Scott Martin for that day he busted up your party and didn't have that big shipment of gold. You framed that note to implicate Scott Martin, Jack Oliver and Martin's daughter. Yes, yuh did."

"Now, looky here," growled Cleeve, sliding off his chair, "you've accused——"

"Stand still!" snapped Brick. "Hands where they are, Cleeve! I'll tell yuh when to move. The prosecution ain't through yet. You three framed that robbery with Limpy Squires, and yuh killed him for double-crossin' yuh. You wanted to kill him just like yuh wanted to kill Scott Martin that time. I'm bettin' that Limpy knew you was the ones what pulled off that Idaho job, and he was Scott Martin's friend, and when yuh opened that treasure-box——"

Brick stopped. Not a man moved. It might have been a painting or a group of lay figures for all the movement. Every man in the room was tensed—nerves taut as fiddle-strings; waiting for the inevitable crash.

Then Silent Slade's voice snapped like a whip—

"King Cleeve was the man they wanted to lynch!"

King Cleeve threw himself sidewise, clawing at his gun; but he never reached it. Scott Martin had sprung—sprung like a panther, clear of the floor, circling King Cleeve with those long, muscular arms, and they crashed out of sight behind the roulette outfit.

The crowd broke for the front and rear door—anywhere to get out of line. Mohr's gun came out like a flash; but Brick's gun spouted lead before Mohr's gun left its holster, and Mohr fell sidewise out of his chair, shot through the shoulder.

As Brick whirled around, the powder from Topaz Tyler's gun burned his cheek, but the bullet went into the bar-mirror. Silent and Harp fired at the same time that Brick did, and Topaz Tyler spun on his heel and went down.

From the doorway came the *whang* of a shot, and Brick felt the sharp sting of a bullet as it burned across his shoulder. Brick whirled to meet this new menace just in time to see Three Star Hennessey hurl a heavy chair through the doorway, crashing it into Bunty Blair's head and shoulders.

Bunty went backward off the sidewalk, and Three Star, following the thrown chair, landed all in a heap on the stunned sheriff. Zell Mohr, recovering from the shock of Brick's bullet, managed to get his pistol into his left hand.

Bang!

From under the card-table came the report of a pistol, and the bullet passed through the high crown of Brick's hat, lifting it off his head. Harp Harris sprang across the room, jumped high and came down upon the card-table, crashing it down upon Zell Mohr, pinning him to the floor.

Brick glanced out of the door, where Three Star was shaking Bunty back to life and talking fast. Three Star was telling Bunty in a few words what a foolish sheriff he was.

Out from the tangle of broken furniture came Scott Martin. His gun still hung in its holster. He looked very tired as he passed his hand wearily across his forehead and looked at Brick.

An outflung hand and a protruding foot were all that showed from the wreckage, but the incoming crowd did not seem to think it worth while to inquire about King Cleeve.

Scott Martin held out his hand to Brick and their hands met.

"Thank yuh, Davidson," said Martin softly. "I've waited a long time for this."

"You're plumb welcome," smiled Brick. "Had quite a party while it lasted; didn't we?"

The crowd stood around Brick and Martin, but no one seemed to have anything to say. Silent and Harp lifted the table off

Zell Mohr. The former Idaho sheriff would need considerable patching up before he could face a judge and jury, but he was still able to curse.

Then came Bunty Blair, elbowing his way through the crowd. The chair had spoiled his physical beauty, but reverses seemed to have brought out a latent quality heretofore unknown to Marlin City.

He reached down and snapped a pair of handcuffs on Zell Mohr. He glanced in the direction of King Cleeve and then over at Topaz Tyler. His head turned and he looked at Brick.

"Davidson," he said, "I begs your pardon. I—I almost made a big mistake."

Bunty held out his hand.

"I'm asking yuh to shake hands with me, Davidson; but I won't blame yuh if yuh don't."

Brick grasped his hand.

"I—I need a good deputy," said Bunty. "If I could get a good one I—I'd resign and let him have my job."

Brick grinned, but shook his head.

"I ain't worth a —— as a sheriff," said Bunty bitterly.

BRICK put his hand on Bunty's shoulder and looked at Bunty's face. Brick swallowed hard. He had antagonized Bunty—detested him—and now he had suddenly discovered that Bunty was rather human after all.

"Think it over, will yuh, Brick?" begged Bunty.

"I know where I throwed my star," said Three Star. "I can get it—easy."

Brick slapped Bunty on the back and walked out of the saloon, with Scott Martin beside him and Silent and Harp trailing. They walked to the hitch-rack.

"Jean will be anxious to know," said Martin. "Mebbe she'd like to have you——"

Brick smiled and shook his head.

"No, pardner; I reckon it's your place to tell her about it."

"Well—" Scott Martin turned to his horse and then looked at Brick—"you're comin' out soon, ain't yuh?"

"Uh-huh."

Brick felt tenderly of his sore shoulder.

"Yeah, I'm comin' out—soon, but you better tell her all about it. You know it as well as I do, pardner. You tell her all there is to tell and get it over with, 'cause—" Brick stepped in close and lowered his voice—" 'cause when I come out there I'm goin' to talk about somethin' besides fightin'."

Martin vaulted to his saddle and rode away with a smile on his face. The three cowboys mounted their horses and rode the other way toward the Nine Bar Nine.

"He ain't," stated Silent to no one in particular, "he ain't goin' to talk about fightin' nor nothin'."

"He don't know for sure," said Harp, " 'cause he ain't never been married nor nothin'."

Brick grinned back at them.

"Yeah, he kinda made a clean-up," said Silent; "but he sure did overlook one big thing, Harp. He landed the road-agents, but he never got that box of gold back."

"There wasn't any money stolen," said Brick.

"There wasn't any— Aw-w-w, whatcha talkin' about?"

Harp spurred in close to Brick.

"Brickie, did you get hit hard enough to make yuh talk thataway?"

"I think that Limpy knew they was framin' Scott Martin," said Brick. "I ain't sure of this, but I'm danged sure that they had the goods on Limpy and threatened to expose him as a member of that old Sandy Creek gang if he didn't tip 'em off to a big shipment of gold from the Whippoorwill mine.

"Topaz Tyler watched things from the mine end. Limpy was afraid to jump out of the country, or was hard-boiled enough to take a chance. He double-crossed 'em, and when they finds it out they killed him when he was leavin' the country.

"When Scott Martin told me his story it looked so much like this same layout that I figured thisaway; Cleeve was the man Martin wanted to lynch. Mohr was the sheriff that saved him. It was a cinch that they worked together.

"That note implicated a woman. If Bunty had found that note it would 'a' been hard to save Scott Martin and Jean. I sure needed a woman.

"Them tracks in the sand bothered me a lot. Scott Martin remarks that Mrs. Wesson only needs overalls and boots to look like a man, and right there it strikes me that Topaz Tyler is my woman. He sets on that rock and changes back to his own

boots; that's why them female tracks never left the rock.

"Them greyhounds not bein' scratched after catchin' four coyotes showed that all was not right. Mohr had a 45-90 Winchester, if yuh remember. That bullet which barely missed Silent was fired from a 45-70 shell, which was a good alibi for that 45-90 rifle, but the shell was swollen at the butt, which showed it wasn't chambered right in the rifle, and the firin'-pin hit the primer too high."

Silent and Harp grinned at Brick's snappy explanation.

"I had 'em cinched," smiled Brick. "They didn't have a single chance in the world except to shoot themselves clear."

"But what about that box of gold?" asked Silent.

"Full of bars of lead. Nothin' but ordinary lead, Silent."

"Well, for gosh sake!" grunted Silent. "Whatcha know about that? Lead bars!"

"Two L's," said Harp musingly. "Two things that has caused a lot of joy and a lot of trouble in this old West. One L started it and another L finished it."

"Lead?" asked Silent.

"Uh-huh," nodded Harp. "Lead and love."

"Some combination."

Silent grinned and slapped Brick on the shoulder.

"I'll back Brick in either one. The old boy sure does *sabe* things; don't he, Harp?"

Brick smiled straight ahead; smiled at a day's work well done; while from behind them came the thrumming of a jew's-harp; a jew's-harp doing its little best to play a wedding march as the three broncos shuffled across the hills and the setting sun cast long shadows across the Sun-Dog trails.

GENTLEMEN ADVENTURERS

***by* Berton Braley**

GENTLEMEN Adventurers with their past behind them
Dicing with their destiny upon the board of fate,
"Rolling down to Rio" or to Zanzibar you find them,
Sometimes on a liner but more often on a freight;
War has taken toll of them—oh, staggering the roll of them,
Sleeping under crosses on the broken fields of France—
But now the rest are free again to tempt the land and sea again,
To roam the wide world over in the footsteps of Romance.

Gentlemen Adventurers hear the great winds calling,
Take again the open road, as restless as of yore,
Mastered by a magic that grows ever more enthralling,
Still they man their argosies for a stranger shore;
Though they dream of treasure there, gold beyond all measure there,
It's the Game they care for and that keeps them playing high,
The luck, and every run of it, the chance and change and fun of it,
That makes them roving gamblers and that holds them till they die!

Gentlemen Adventurers, whom age can never wither,
Whose infinite variety dull custom can not stale,
Youth is in the heart of them, and Fortune's gay "come hither"
Sends them forth at eighty on a mad, fantastic trail!
Then here's good strength and health to them and just enough of wealth to them
To start them on their travels—it's all they want or use,
Here's luck, and for the rest of it, be sure they'll make the best of it,
Gentleman Adventurers, wherever they may cruise.

Author of "Every Man's Hand," "The Burden Paternal," etc.

"YOU'D better leave that cash-box behind in the bank if you're bent on adopting this here yaller-belly, cap'n," grumbled Tod Carter, mate of the *Black Pearl* trading-schooner.

"Red" Saunders laughed quietly, good humor and utter lack of apprehension in every line of his strong, bronzed features. He was known throughout the seven seas, and some others not included in the seven, was this big, fearless skipper with the close-trading propensities of the hard-bitten commercialist, the nattiness of a naval officer in his person and his navigation, and the manners and carriage—when he chose—of a gentleman. And no man had ever been able to say that a danger or a difficulty could affect the big red-headed skipper in any way unless it was to set him more stubbornly on the scent of whatever he went after.

"They don't give medals for worrying, Carter," he said; "otherwise that bread-chest of yours would look like a picture of a ribbon-counter on bargain day. The boy goes with us; so does the cash-box. I have taken a fancy to the one, and have always had a sneaking regard for the other.

"Go ahead and get your anchor, old chap, and let's get away from this putrid pestuary as soon as possible: I've a hunch that our first trip to Timor will produce results."

It did. But it's good seamanship to get the anchor up before piling on canvas, and while the anchor comes up it will be well to go over the situation as it stood when the *Black Pearl* left her steamy anchorage a bit to the southward of Macassar in Celebes, bound for Lifou in Timor.

SAUNDERS was a stormy petrel of trade. When he quit a port it was long odds that his next stamping-ground might be in a far-distant part of the wide ocean. Therefore he preferred his own strong-box to all the banks in the world; and in order to accommodate his growing store without building a bigger ship he had a habit of converting first his trade into cash, and then his cash into less bulky gems of various kinds.

From time to time he heard of rich finds of precious stones or pearls; finds of individual gems of such vastly enhanced value over mere carat appraisal as still further to reduce the space required for stowage, if he could secure them. So his little steel box contained in the space of a cheese-cutter cap or so wealth which in any other form would have occupied many times the room.

His visit to Macassar had resulted in the exchange of half a pint of mixed rubies, pearls and turquoises for half a dozen flawless black pearls, a few dazzling pink ones and two hybrids, pink and black combined, which left his box loosely packed but caused his smile to broaden like the sun at noon.

And in Macassar he shipped the pale, yellow youth to whom grim old Tod Carter had taken exception. A man who could

take a beating and still fight always found a sympathizer in Saunders; and when on his way to the boat on the Macassar coast he stumbled upon a street-fight in which a slim, lemon-tinted native of variegated parentage was going down under many blouses, squealing like a coward but fighting back like a hero, the burly skipper took a hand in his defense. A couple of swipes of his big fists scattered the mob; and when he picked up a fallen attacker and hurled him bodily among his fellows like a ball at alley-pins the rumpus was over.

"Here, quit that foolery, buddy!" he laughed when the yellow youth fawned at his knees like a big dog. "Stand up, lad; I'll see you clear."

"I come wid you, sar," the man panted, glaring around in obvious terror. "I stay here I git kill, sar."

"But you can't come with me, sonny. I'm bound to sea."

"Orright. I go sea too."

Taking no rebuff, the little native elected himself body-servant to the skipper, and by accepting the more or less unwelcome service Red Saunders was the gainer. Tod Carter made his protest, and repeated it as already set forth, but Parchelly, as the youth called himself, was a member of the *Black Pearl's* crew when the coast of Celebes became a gray blur merging into the night mists astern.

"He's all right, Carter; don't worry," the skipper smiled when the mate relieved him for supper and was still grumbling about the liberty accorded to Parchelly.

Tod Carter had been right-hand man and close companion to Saunders in innumerable exploits all through the Far East, the Pacific and the East African seaboard for many years, and a deep affection existed between the men only to be understood by those who have lived a similar life and have been lucky enough to meet up with one sterling soul in harmony with their own. Except for sheer physical strength the two men were entirely dissimilar; and even in strength Saunders was too greatly Carter's master for them ever to regard each other with jealousy. In other ways they differed so widely that it was undoubtedly the sheer contrast which welded them so closely together in comradeship.

Where the skipper refused to see trouble until he bumped into it, Carter smelled it as far off as he could sniff bad weather; where the mate doubted, Saunders radiated assurance; if terrific odds suddenly rolled up against them— Yes, that was one other point where they agreed; both would face odds, and both would fight the harder as the odds multiplied; and each had yet to see the other let go a hold when he had it.

Tod Carter would grumble and complain right up to the point of conflict, and go into and through a scrap still grumbling, but fighting like a Highlander after prayers. Saunders rarely permitted a foe to wipe the smile from his handsome face; in fact, one man who had the nerve to face him a second time had suddenly gone panicky at seeing the skipper's smile brighten and broaden, and had run away without shame, fearful for his life. That yarn still goes around certain ports in Northern Queensland.

The smile of Red Saunders was a thing to be noticed. It could mean a friendship as wide and deep as the ocean, or it might simply mean that a presumptuous antagonist was about to peek in through the Pearly Gates, even if he did not actually enter.

"Don't lose sleep over Parchelly," the skipper told Carter. "The lad's grateful to me for saving his yellow skin. He's a queer mixture; most of these Timor chaps are, with the Dutch and Portuguese strains——"

"Ho, and he's a Timor scut, is he?" grunted Carter, peering hard into the skipper's laughing face. "And, if I may ask, is there any connection between findin' this here yaller-belly and us goin' to Timor, where he belongs? Not as it's any o' my business, o' course."

"There's a connection surely, Carter. I'd never have given Timor a thought if Parchelly hadn't told me in gratitude that there are rich pickings to be had by the first trader to see the old chief of——"

"And off you go like a country slob tryin' to find the little pea under the walnut-shells, to git us into another o' them woolly messes wi' a swarm o' niggers, just on a yaller swab's say-so! Maybe I'm gettin' too old, cap'n. I don't see no fun in such Flyin' Dutchman cruises no more. I better quit soon's we get back to some four-square port."

Saunders laughed softly and let his mate go on. He knew well enough that when old Tod Carter quit there would remain no unexploited fields within the *Black Pearl's* scope; either that, or Tod Carter would be dead.

When the grizzled old grumbler finished his growl Saunders again gave him the schooner's course, added a hint about currents and turned to go to his supper, pausing to add as he half-drew the companion-slide:

"Give the lad a chance, Tod. He's either the most grateful little cuss I've met, or the best actor. If what he says is right there's a haul to be made in Lifou that'll put us all on Easy Street for life."

"Queer Street, you mean!" grunted the mate, and turned aft, at once to become the alert, seamanly watch officer and to forget all about Timor, Parchelly, and Queer or Easy Streets until his watch was done.

CERTAINLY the little Timor hybrid appeared sincere in his affection for Saunders. Tomba, the Fiji steward, found plenty of time on his hands because Parchelly assumed charge of Saunders' body-service, and seemed ready to fight for the privilege too.

Yet there were times when Red Saunders harbored a faint doubt about his new valet; a suspicion that after all old Tod Carter might have weighed the little yellow man up correctly. Parchelly was certainly a strange mixture of sobbing, whimpering, fighting frenzy and cringing cowardice. Had the skipper not witnessed how he could fight for his skin, he would have kicked him over the side in sheer disgust when the Jap cook beat the oakum out of him with a skillet without drawing any retaliation.

Then again there was Tomba. Frizzy-haired Tomba was no weakling; there was no room for such in the *Black Pearl;* but in a matter of trifling concern touching on the cleaning of the skipper's cabin Parchelly gave the old Fijian a fright which ever after forestalled interference from that source.

All things considered, it was a caution which ruled Saunders at last, when he dropped anchor in a jungle-fringed creek five miles outside Lifou town and prepared to go ashore to look over the prospect for trade. He took his case of pearls out of the strong-box and secured them in his inside pocket in full view of Parchelly. He grinned when he detected in the little yellow man's eyes a glint of intense interest; and he chuckled happily as he entered his cabin again, ostensibly to get some shells for his gun, and replaced the gems in their proper hiding-place.

"That's drawing a red herring over the trail," he muttered. "Perhaps the boy's all right. If he is, there's no harm done. If he's wrong, he won't bother this chest while he thinks I have the things on me. So that's that."

At the gangway he paused a minute before stepping into his boat, and surveyed the blue mountains beyond the tangled jungle. No sign of human habitation appeared; neither could he discern anything which hinted at a trail leading townward or back into the forest. Yet Parchelly had indicated this spot as the best from which to interview Sadrash, the head man—sultan he called himself—of all that portion of Portuguese Timor outside the town itself.

It was advisable to anchor out of sight of Lifou. The Portuguese authorities had found it cheaper, and less bother, to leave native affairs in Sadrash's hands; but they had no suspicion to what extent the old rascal actually saved them work and worry in matters closely concerning revenue. So it was out of the question to deal with him direct from Lifou. Saunders finally nodded his head to Carter.

"I'll go look-see, Tod. Keep your eyes skinned, and don't let any natives come on board unless they show good credentials from the old Pooh-Bah himself. Keep an eye on your friend Parchelly, too," he smiled, lowering his tone.

Parchelly was hovering near with an expression on his face which might have been agitation, doubt or impatience.

"He's home now, you know, and it's now or never he'll prove whether you or I have him sized up right. If I'm not back by sundown clap a strong guard at the rails and bring half a dozen boys to see what I've tumbled into. But I'll be back, I expect.

"Another thing. Watch your ground tackle. Keep all clear in case it's a quick hop out."

The skipper sent his boat back to the schooner as soon as he stepped ashore, and straightway plunged into the gloomy jungle at the only spot which seemed to offer ingress. At first the path was all but non-existent; but just as the forest grew black with shadow and appeared to thicken to impenetrability he emerged into a wide glade in the midst of scattered, rotting tree-trunks, and a track of wagon-width opened before him. To all appearances the jungle might have been devoid of human life, though teeming

with birds and small beasts, insects and slithering reptiles. Yet there was a vague suggestion ever present of lurking bodies and peering eyes, in no way connected with the swinging monkeys; and as Saunders strode forward he held himself alert, using every precaution against surprize without showing outwardly that he felt uneasy.

It was with something of a shock that he presently emerged from the forest and came upon a closely huddled village enclosed within a wattle-and-daub wall. As he paused for a moment in search of the entrance, he could have sworn that several figures hurried past him some distance away, out of the jungle, and disappeared through the wall.

But when he approached, and pushed in through a wicket door which he found open, he experienced no opposition; he saw a few natives, women and children as well as men, and as he neared the center of the huddled huts and came up beside a large, pretentious bungalow with glass windows he was mildly surprized to see several men who might have been white once. Of all breeds they seemed, and all bore the stamp of rascality, but white undoubtedly, except for the coloring of sun and weather.

"HERE, you whiskers," he hailed, "take me to old Sadrash, will you?"

The man accosted turned slowly and flung an insolent glance at Saunders.

"The sultan is asleep," he retorted, and promptly turned away again.

That was not Saunders' idea of getting business done. He overtook the fellow in half a dozen long strides, and swung him around as easily as he would turn a wheel.

"Listen, buddy, you wake him up. I've come all the way to Lifou to talk trade with his nibs, and my time's as precious as his."

"We know all about you," the man returned. "It's part of our business to get to know things in advance. And it ain't healthy to go waking the sultan out of his after-dinner nap, old codger.

"If you want to see him today you wait until he sends for you. He'll know you're here the minute he wakes. You might as well go back to your schooner, though, for he won't talk trade with you until he gets his report from the officers he's sent down to inspect your outfit."

Though expecting something of the kind, Saunders felt a trifle uneasy at the suggestion of native or half-breed officials making free of his little ship in his absence. Tod Carter was sound and safe, but he lacked that saving sense of humor possessed by Saunders, which would enable him to endure patiently the petty insolence of intruding visitors. He might easily make a break which would ruin all chance of successful trading, especially if the visiting officials were of the same type as this bewhiskered, hybrid ruffian who treated the skipper so offhandedly.

"So that's the game, is it?" he retorted. "All right, my ugly friend; I'll take a look at those officials first, to be sure they're honest, then I'll come back with them and interview the old chap."

The man laughed harshly, placing himself before the skipper as he turned to retrace his track.

"Not so fast, old-timer," he said, and swung his belt around so that a heavy holster came near to hand. "Orders is to hold you here. P'raps you won't have to go back to the ship at all; see? Sadrash decides them things for himself. If he wants anything you've got, he'll take it. P'raps he'll feel good and give ye some coconuts or somethin' for what he takes, and p'raps——"

"Perhaps not," the skipper broke in with one of his sunniest smiles.

Like a streak of light he pounced upon the man, flung him aside from the path into the jungle and snatched his revolver from the heavy holster.

"Now stand up," he snapped. "I don't do business the way you say. You plod on ahead of me, and feel this."

He jabbed the pistol-muzzle into the man's back.

"You know best whether it's loaded. It's your own. So march. Hold me here, hey? Not an army like you."

They started forward, and Saunders forced his unwilling guide to keep aside from the trail. He also forced him to hail a couple of curious women who peered after them, telling them that all was well.

And as he trod in the guide's steps the thought of Tod Carter's outspoken distrust of Parchelly recurred to him sharply. For the first time he really believed that he had made one of his rare mistakes in the little Timor man. He felt sore to madness, for his mistakes in human nature, as his failures

in his undertakings, were amazingly few.

The pistol prodded viciously into the fellow ahead.

"So I am to be held here, hey? Sort of expected me, did you?" Saunders remarked. "Perhaps that little snake Parchelly has been smarter than I thought, and sent on word by bush telegraph?"

The man half-swung around, his evil face working curiously.

"Parchelly?" he grinned, showing yellow teeth. "Ho, so you got him, did you? Well, maybe he did let the sultan know about you. Y'see, Sadrash had Parchelly flogged 'most to death and sewed him up in a cowskin for gettin' sassy. You bet Parchelly wouldn't come back here unless he could bring a offering to square hisself. Ho, that's a good one, mister!"

Chuckling, the fellow resumed his way, and not another word would he utter, but ever he kept up a running chuckle of deeply rooted mirth which set Saunders to figuring closely just how much of a tangle he had ventured into this time. Not that it made much difference. His complete self-confidence was not to be broken by mere possibilities. But he began to see something far less simple than a desire to trade in the methods of this old Timor sultan.

Tales had not been wanting of such vessels as his own being unaccountably lost in the Flores and Banda Seas, and nearly always the missing ships had been self-owned by their masters, and making just one more clean-up voyage before quitting the seas for markets of disposal. And Parchelly might easily be an ultra-cunning decoy, willing to stage a street fracas and to accept a personal beating in order to attract the attention of the shipmaster he was sent out for.

"What confounded nonsense!"

Saunders laughed aloud at the thought.

"Theatrical stuff like that is only done in films. I don't believe Parchelly could do it. Anyway——"

They were nearing the shore, and he was willing to let the event decide. Then they were on the edge of the creek. The schooner's boat was there with two wide-eyed Gilbert Islanders waiting, and the schooner herself lay in apparent quiet, with only a couple of heads visible above her rails.

"Everything all right, Sammy?" the skipper hailed.

One of the boatmen grinned without mirth.

"No, sar; he all wrong. Massa Ca'ter he go look for dat Parchelly fella. He——"

"What?" snapped Saunders, suddenly smitten with foreboding.

"Parchelly he bus' open de safe, cap'n, an' run fas' ashore. Den Massa Ca'ter he say to plenty ob mans dat come on board from de sultan, 'Yo' git off dis ship, I got bodder ob my own,' an' dey no go, so he tell us to t'row 'em in de ribber. When dey git to land, dey holler very loud dat de sultan come back soon an' burn we up, sar."

"So that's how it stands, hey?" mused Saunders, darkly scanning the river and its encroaching jungle fringe.

Soon he came to a decision.

"Sammy," he said, "take charge of this fellow. If he gives you trouble you may cook him and eat him. Take him on board, and lock him up.

"And listen. Don't let another man climb over that schooner's rail unless it's one of our own men. Keep your eyes open, now."

Taking a whistle from his pocket, he blew a series of shrill blasts that echoed through the gloomy forest and awakened the rivalry of hosts of feathered things. Twice the call was repeated before Tod Carter plunged out of the bush, looking as black as thunder, with a sore and savage crew of Kingsmillers and Gilbert Islanders at his heels.

"Find him?" snapped the skipper.

The party's blank looks answered him.

"Find him!" growled the mate, spitting emphatically into the river. "'Course we didn't find him! Darned good thing, I say, that you was sensible enough to put them pearls in your pocket before goin' ashore. He cleaned out the safe of all the rest o' the stuff."

"And, by Godfrey, he got the pearls too!" the skipper rejoined. "You were right, Carter. I was foolish. Now let's go and straighten things out and make my foolishness profitable."

"That'll take some doin'," grumbled old Tod.

"Oh, go ahead just the same, cap'n," he hastened to add, catching the hard glint in the skipper's gray eyes. "You ain't got to ask or order me or the boys. Where you goes we goes, foolish or not. But—" his

voice rumbled off in a low, earnest growl—"I'd surely like to get my hooks on to that Parchelly!"

AS THEY marched back along the route already traversed twice by the skipper the gloom of the forest deepened with waning day, and there descended again a subtle suggestion of human presence which brought out all the half-dormant primitive bush instinct of the *Black Pearl's* native crew. Lithe Gilbert Islanders became silent, stealthy shapes among the dense tangle of jungle; shining brown faces assumed stern lines of predatory keenness; coal-black eyes glittered metallically.

Yet no human obstacle confronted them. Even the beasts and creeping things of the forest appeared to have withdrawn before their advance. Presently, in response to an involuntary oath from Carter following a headlong stumble over a root, Saunders laughed softly as if the mate's mishap had broken a tension, and remarked:

"Tod, old horse, you must have given the sultan's emissaries a rough handling to make you so darned taut-strung now. What did ye do to 'em?"

"Do?" echoed Tod, grinning in spite of his intense devotion to the job of keeping his feet clear and his eyes free of brushing leaves and swinging vines. "Do? Why, blast 'em, that mob o' yaller-ocher fakers pulled some yarn on me that they was reg'lar customs guys and showed a bit o' dirty parchment signed by a spider-crawl signature which they said was old Sadrash's, and said they was come to rummage the ship.

"I told 'em they could stay alongside until you come back, and they said you wouldn't come back until they took their report to Sadrash, and they all grinned like monkeys. Said you was being held—they'd heard about your reputation—" here Tod Carter indulged in a grim chuckle—"and Sadrash wasn't takin' no chances on the safety of his officers.

"So I gives the boys a wink to keep their eyes peeled and let the gang on board. They peeped down the hatch, but that wasn't what they was after. No, sir! They wanted to see the cabin.

"Then when I'd about decided to show 'em everything but keep tabs of 'em that blasted Parchelly runs up, dodges when I wasn't lookin', and was overboard and half-way to shore before I twigged him. I run below, and be darned if he hadn't opened your safe with a skiliton-key or something, and there we was, robbed by a yeller-bellied shipmate as ought never to have been aboard, and boarded by a lot o' dirty scuts o' fake officers as was more like pirates than customs men—not as there's much difference."

"Yes; but what did you do to them?" chuckled Saunders.

"Dumped 'em into the river, and lit out after Parchelly."

"Well, well; patience, old chap. You'll catch up with him when we come before the Sultan Sadrash, never fear," the skipper returned, and strode along in the wake of his leading man.

Again, and more insistently, came the suggestion of a lurking presence surrounding them, and the jungle had become dark with a cold gloom by the time they broke, shivering with chill and taut nerves, through the last cane barrier and into the stockaded village.

"Deserted!" Carter ejaculated, wiping cold sweat from his eyes. "Thought you said——"

"Shut up!" the skipper rejoined, irritably for a wonder. "This place is deserted like ——'s deserted. Two of you boys hide yourselves outside the gate here. Come on, the rest of you. Straight to the big hut."

The queer, brooding quiet increased as they stamped across the floor of a wide veranda, making their steps echo and re-echo jarringly. Inside the big hut Saunders saw that it was almost dark, yet with sufficient glow from some hidden lamp to suggest that people might be inside and awake. The nostrils, too, were assailed rather than soothed with odors so richly sensuous as to render breathing difficult.

Impatiently the big skipper seized a heavy floating curtain at the doorway and tore it down; then he strode into a vast, shadowy chamber, his men close at his heels, and strove against the blinding gloom with straining eyes.

"I want to see the chief, Sadrash; where is he?" Saunders demanded sharply.

The only reply he received was the sudden heavy jarring crash of a door slamming behind him, a low, cunning laugh before, and the metallic sound of a score of rifles being cocked or charged all about his little party.

"You shall see the Sultan Sadrash when your eyes grow as keen in the dark as mine," mocked a voice.

Something hard touched his breast. His hand, involuntarily seeking, touched the cold barrel of a rifle.

"Trapped!" quoth Tod Carter, in a tone which said plainly, "I told you so!"

"Stand fast, and don't make any breaks," Saunders ordered imperatively. "Mark time until we can see. Use your eyes, boys."

Soon the gloom seemed to lighten. In recesses all about the chamber lamps burned, and their wicks were being turned up gradually. As soon as eyes might see clearly the skipper and his men saw this:

On a low, thickly cushioned platform, more than a dais but scarcely a throne, sat a thin little creature having an enormous head, dressed like some gorgeous pantomime travesty on royalty. His great skull was covered with a huge turban, jeweled and befeathered; his face was hidden, except for a pair of evilly brilliant eyes and an arched beak of a nose, in a beard of many hues which stuck out around him like a lion's mane.

A great curved simitar lay across his knees, naked and gleaming; in his eyes glittered cruelty and greed; maned like a lion, he made one shudder with the resemblance he bore to a hyena possessed of a devil.

And the dozen or so of nondescript white men standing around him were quite obviously scared to death of the little creature. There were a score of natives, too; and these were standing by like so many terrified sheep, trembling to be on the jump at the sultan's least word; and this might have been expected in a place like Timor, where sultans and slave-owning chiefs probably flourished when China was struggling to learn its first ideograph.

But for white men, beach-combers, adventurers, rascals undoubtedly, to serve a native sultan and stand frankly in fear of him was something so utterly unexpected that Saunders gave the little potentate more than a passing glance before he addressed him.

"YOU'RE Sadrash, I suppose," he said at length. "I'm Saunders, of the *Black Pearl* schooner. I want my boy, Parchelly, and the contents of my safe. Out with 'em."

A concerted gasp of horror filled the chamber, the horror of the sultan's men at the effrontery of the captive who refused to accept his position but addressed their chief rather like a captor. The sultan himself appeared to swell with fury. His eyes shot sparks, and his great beard bristled. With nervous hands clutching the handle of his simitar, and trembling with passion, he screamed in shrill, broken English:

"Parchelly is my slave! It is you who shall give him up! Your ship shall burn, and you shall burn too, if Parchelly is not before me this night."

"Burn?" laughed the skipper contemptuously. "You're hot stuff, old boy, to talk of burning me. I came here to trade with you. You sent men to board my ship in my absence, and your Parchelly, who lured me to come to your pestilential creek, stole the contents of my safe and brought 'em to you. Now you produce or it's you who'll sizzle, no mistake!"

"You lie! Parchelly came not to me!" the little sultan screamed, purple with fury.

Then, half-rising, laying down his simitar the better to help himself up, he commanded:

"Seize them! Bind them! Out with you and fire their ship!"

Scowling men, white and yellow and brown, closed in about the *Black Pearl's* men, and Tod Carter spat on his hands. A rifle-barrel knocked his hands down as he involuntarily felt for his revolver; a Gilbert Islander stumbled under a blow on the head, dealt to persuade him to quit fighting. It seemed as if at last Red Saunders had ventured into an inescapable trap, for his men were outnumbered two to one, and the two were armed. But what success he had achieved had not been won by slow wits.

Like a flash the thought crossed his mind that perhaps he had misjudged Parchelly after all; that the boy had not come to the sultan with his stolen loot. But the thought only induced the equally bitter one that his protégé could in that case only have stolen the pearls for himself.

All this passed through his brain with the speed of light. As swiftly came the decision to prove the truth.

"Stand by, Tod!" he snapped in his islanders' native tongue.

With the words he hurled two men aside who held his arms and leaped straight forward to pounce upon the half-risen sultan.

So swift, so decided, was he in action that he had taken an unbreakable grip on the sultan's beard with one hand and snatched up the great simitar with the other before even his own men had fairly grasped his intention. Then with the gleaming blade held across the hairy throat of the chief he barked out:

"Stand back, you scum, unless you want to see the old boy's throat cut. Tell 'em to drop their guns, Sadrash."

The keen edge touched the skin; the great bush of whiskers stood out straight as Saunders tugged the huge head backward to tighten the withered neck; and Sadrash squealed in terror to his men to do as they were ordered. The weapons fell to the floor with a crash, and then the skipper laughed grimly.

"Herd 'em up, lads! Keep a lookout at the door, while I have a little chat with this old monkey."

That first application of the keen edge of Sadrash's big simitar to its owner's throat had been so intimate as to leave hairs upon the blade. As the skipper put question after question to the ancient rascal he idly shaved more hairs from the withered neck, and as question after question brought unsatisfactory replies, so insistent as almost to convince, and the sultan's befooled bodyguard remained staring in genuine terror, a grimly humorous notion brought a sunny smile to the skipper's face. He deliberately made a sweeping cut and sheared off a thick mass of bristly hair.

"Be brave, little man," he laughed while the sultan squealed shrilly with the excruciating rasp of the dry shave.

Another sweep of the blade sheared a bigger patch, and another squeal announced it.

"Now you tell up, Sadrash, old dear. Sure you know where Parchelly is. Didn't he fetch you my jewel-case? No? Very well. The shave won't cost you a darned cent."

Tugging Sadrash's head back painfully, Saunders set to work to shear him in earnest.

"Kill them! Kill them!" screamed the sultan in frenzy.

A deep murmur rose from his men, and they involuntarily moved forward, forgetting their own plight in their inherent fear of their chief.

"Steady!" the skipper warned. "Stay where you are unless you want me to toss his ugly head among you for a football. Now, Sadrash, for the last time, are you going to produce my boy and my valuables?"

Swiftly he sliced away mass after mass of the terrifying whiskers, making the sultan writhe in real agony. For a minute Sadrash was stubborn. Then when he was all but shaved clean he began to whine:

"Your boy is not here. He has not come back. He is a slave who has run away. Go to your ship, and go away! Go away!"

Sincerity rang in every word, and Saunders released the big head and stood back in momentary perplexity. And as he regarded his handiwork he laughed amusedly, and the laugh found echo in all his own men and at least one of the white bodyguard of Sadrash..

The reason was plain, even in the imperfect light of the interior. Every bit of Sadrash's terrifying aspect had been due to that monstrous beard, which, emphasizing vividly the black eagle eyes and the hooked eagle nose, hid entirely the weak, all but toothless mouth and the chinless lower jaw.

But there was another side to the situation now. The sultan raved, and he might rave, at his mongrel crew to destroy the insolent intruder; and his men, no longer holding him in the awe that he inspired a few moments before, might ignore his ravings; but Saunders realized in a flash that any threat he held over the sultan's head now could not prevent that gang of nondescript white men from taking a hand for themselves if he and his crew gave the least opportunity.

"Carter, take this," he said quickly, handing the mate Sadrash's simitar. "Two of you boys come with me; the rest keep this gang in order. I'll soon see if this place holds anything worth while to pay us for our trip."

Two islanders followed silently; they passed out by the two lookouts Saunders had posted when he entered, and searched rapidly for anything in the nature of a storehouse. There was a long, low godown in the rear of the big chamber, whose barred door and grated windows seemed to indicate that the contents might be worth investigating.

Toward the door they ran; but while the skipper's hands were on the massive wooden door-bar the distant forest rang with growing human sound, an answering howl pealed up from a mob of women who came running from the holes they had hidden in, and

Sammy, one of the lookouts, appeared in haste.

"Cap'n!" he announced. "De woods he full ob mans wif gun an' spear, sar! One, two t'ousand, sure. What can do?"

Inured as he was to facing odds, Saunders was no scatter-brained fool to throw his men away needlessly. He remembered the threat that his schooner would be burned. He recalled the scanty numbers of the ship-guard left on board.

And against them, in face of imminent trouble, was a sun-scorched go-down of uncertain contents, a rapidly lowering jungle night, a hostile village and the conviction that he had forced the truth from the sultan's unwilling throat—in short, that his pearls and other effects were irrecoverably lost, and that he stood fair to lose his schooner and the lives of his men. As for his own life, he never let that sway him in any conceivable event. That was Red Saunders.

"Begins to look as if we've backed a loser, Sammy," he replied briskly. "Come along boys."

Reentering the chamber, he took hold of Sadrash, tucking him under one powerful arm.

"Scat, Carter!" he snapped. "Have the boys gather up these guns, or break 'em, and follow me. Looks like a fight on hand before we sail from this place!"

Then he swung his captive off his feet and plunged out and into the forest. Carter followed, swinging the great simitar.

THE fight turned from a prospect to a certainty. Out of the jungle swarmed a small army of dark shapes, and in answer to the howls of their released but disarmed fellows guns began to spit, and the swarm converged upon the little band of retreating *Black Pearl* boys. And highest of all the urging squeals was the thin pipe of the terrified Sadrash, desperation forcing his vocal cords to rebel against the bodily fears inspired by that awful grip about his squirming form.

"Got to stop that, old-timer," grunted Saunders, stumbling heavily in the darkness as the old reprobate kicked like a boy under parental coercion.

He shifted his pistol to the hand holding Sadrash and drew his knife, jabbing the point persuasively into the skinny ribs.

"Now, you runt, squeal all you want," he gritted. "But squeal right, and keep your dogs at heel, or I'll let your withered tripes out."

The sailors, at Carter's heels, were fighting with grim ferocity when Saunders plowed forward again, and many of them bore hurts sore enough to constitute a warning that they had a long way to go yet. But Sadrash proved a potent talisman to those of his men who had not yet seen him closely in his shaven state, even if his body-guard had laughed at sight of him; and as the forest was penetrated deeper toward the night-blanketed creek only the rear-guard of the schooner's men were forced to turn to fight their pursuers every few yards.

It was within sound of the sea and sight of the dim creek that Sadrash's body-guard managed to convince their mates of the sultan's fall from majesty in their eyes, and by that time Red Saunders was right in his element—in sight of his own good little ship, with the knowledge, imparted by lantern signals, that she was still intact and her small gang of watchmen yet complete.

His whistle shrilled a summons for the boats to hasten, and he led his boys in a last desperate charge which was to scatter his foes back far enough to permit them all to embark. He heard the rattle of oars, and relief seemed very near.

But the old chief had reached the limit of his usefulness as a talisman. Shriek as he might, his rascals ignored both entreaties and threats and surged forward with bitter insistence. Saunders dropped his knife, seized Sadrash in both hands and hove him high in the air above his head.

"All right," he roared. "If you want him, here he comes." He pitched the old villain headlong into the midst of his gang, and turned to meet the boats.

But the darkness which impeded the boats among the half-submerged jungle roots aided Sadrash's men. When he tumbled among them, whimpering with rage, even the white men who had seen him changed by a dry shave from a terrifying old villain into a mean-faced, impotent, skinny image, rallied to back him and stand off the sailors from embarking. And the boats were yet struggling with the mangrove barrier. The overwhelming army of enraged whites and Timoreans came on again, their growling and cursing resounding through the black jungle.

"Stand fast, bullies!" gritted the skipper,

himself snatching the great simitar out of Carter's hands and sweeping it about his head.

It whistled and sang as he plied it, and for a breath men fell back before its awful menace. But numbers were potent; the gang caught the full significance of the boats' predicament and surged forward resistlessly. Two of the *Black Pearl's* men were down.

"Fight 'em, boys; fight 'em!" panted Red, fighting like one possessed himself.

Inevitably the rush came on. The boats were coming too late this time.

Then out upon the discord of battle shrilled another, keener voice—a voice like that of a minor devilene—and between the fighting bands leaped a figure of appalling gesture, sobbing hysterically, shrieking of sudden death, whirling a murderous Dyak blade about his bowed head.

Straight for Sadrash he went. The blade sang and chopped, and Sadrash's shorn head flew from his shoulders into the face of his nearest adherent, his blood bespattering a score of others who shrank back from the shower.

And the skipper seized the Heaven-sent chance, willing to wait for explanations. His men rallied once more, and the boats grated on the shore as the last of the attackers vanished into the forest.

Then the strange apparition crept up to the skipper and fawned at his feet. There was a bundle tied about his neck, and this he nervously untied.

"Hey, Carter, look here," cried Saunders triumphantly. "It's Parchelly! I told you he was all right."

"Huh! Wait till he chucks that ruddy big knife away," retorted Tod Carter, still unconvinced.

Parchelly got his bundle free, handed it to Saunders, and flashed a strangely indulgent smile at the grim old mate as he told the skipper what had happened.

"I see you put dis pearls in yo' pocket, sar, and I was go to foller you 'shore. Den I watch you an' you put dem in iron box ag'in. So I watch fo' you. I know dis bad peoples here; oh, yis, very mooch, sar.

"Den come Sadrash's men, an' I know dey come fo' rob dis ship. I oppen box wid piecee wire like de bad white man show Sadrash when he want to open iron box from steamer he burn, an' swim 'shore an' hide in de jungle.

"I see Misser Carter t'row de men into de river, an' I wait fo' git on board ag'in. But oder mans see me, an' many mile I r-run, very fas', before I can git back here ag'in. Den I hear de fight, an' I kill one o' Sadrash's guard wid a beeg stone, and steal him sword. Dat's all, sar. I very glad see you ag'in, sar."

Saunders laughed softly, patting Parchelly's curly head. He glanced toward Carter; but that dour and disgruntled worthy was already stepping into a boat, growling back over his shoulder:

"Might as well pull out o' here. Call it a failure, cap'n, for once, and darn lucky we are that you didn't lose what you brought here with you too."

"Not quite a failure either, Tod," the skipper chuckled. "It's something to have found that I was not mistaken when I took Parchelly aboard and rated him a man. And what the lad's just hinted about a steamer being burned here and looted, gives me an idea that the authorities in Lifou town might welcome the news and be inclined to stump up a bit toward our expenses for wiping out old Sadrash."

"Now yer hollering!" quoth Carter cheerfully. "Another honest man won't annoy us, and he won't be no novelty either, in the *Black Pearl;* but while praisin' honesty, cap'n, don't ever forget it takes freight to stiffen the schooner. Let's go."

The BEAR-TAMER'S DAUGHTER

by Konrad Bercovici

Author of "Vlad's Son."

COSTA, the bear-tamer, was well known all along the Carpathian Mountains; on the Hungarian side of the chain of mountains as well as on the Rumanian side. Of the hundreds of Gipsies, roving to and fro between the villages, dancing their bears before inns and on the market-places, of the hundreds of Gipsies more than half bought their bears from Costa.

A bear tamed by Costa was worth a fortune. It could dance on all fours and waltz on its hind legs to the sound of a tambourine or the music of a flute; it turned somersaults, could stand on its head, roll a log or an empty barrel, stand at attention and do a thousand other cute things to amuse children and grown-ups.

And Costa was continually inventing new tricks for his bears. He could teach them anything he wanted. Once in Costa's hands a bear was not let go until it was an accomplished artist and could be relied upon to do the bidding of its master.

In a gully deep down between two mountains Costa had his establishment. In the Winter, in the cold Carpathian Winter, in large holes he had dug out in the mountainsides, and from early Spring to late in the Fall in small tents that were pitched between the tall, sun-hungry trees, Costa lived with his daughter Margarita.

In a cranny at the foot of the mountain was the school. There, Costa, all alone, surrounded only by huge brown bears, man-eating beasts caught only yesterday, plied his trade.

It was Costa's custom to leave his gully early every Spring, as soon as the snow began to melt, to go in search of bears. With a large loaf of black bread and a piece of cheese in a carpet-bag, a bottle of whisky in the long upper of one of his boots, a sharp knife in the other, a well-oiled army revolver in his wide red belt, a rope, a few short chains the links of which he had himself forged during the long Winter months, the pointed black fur cap 'way down over his bushy brows, Costa was off among the mountains in search of bears.

Sometimes, when in luck, he returned the same day or the same night, dragging a huge she-bear, not yet completely awakened from her Winter sleep, at the end of the rope, and a little cub or two, hind paws tied to hind paws, slung on his shoulders. At other times Costa was away for days and weeks before coming home.

He never came home empty-handed and, indeed, it was a bad week when the heavily bearded, tall black-eyed Gipsy did not sell at least one fresh bearskin to some innkeeper.

But he was not much interested in killing bears, was Costa. He needed them alive. He knew every inch of the Carpathian Mountains and knew every bear-hole. He had a thousand different tricks for catching a bear alive.

If there were no tracks about the bear's Winter home Costa would empty half his flask of whisky in an earthen dish and place it at one of the two exits a she-bear generally makes before going to hibernate. Then

he would gather a few sticks, set them on fire, sprinkle them with sulfur, place them near the other exit and withdraw to observe developments.

If the bear was beginning to awaken from her long sleep the smoke and the odor of sulfur would have its effect. The beast would soon come upon the bowl filled with alcohol, turn around it, smell it, taste it and finish by lapping it dry.

A while later Costa on all fours would creep in, knife between his teeth, pistol in one hand and ready rope noose in the other. If his calculations had not gone amiss, if the whisky had been of the right kind, Costa was soon dragging a bear behind the rope.

But that was only one of a thousand ways of catching a bear alive. The real manner was determined according to conditions, whims and instinct. After catching a dozen bears or so, the schooling would begin. No matter how a freshly caught bear tugged at the chain when any one approached it, when Costa came near the beast it would cringe and whine. In a week at the most the fiercest bear was tamed.

He would take the beast to the *cainny*, to the "private school," as he called the fissure in the mountain, and in a day or two Master Bruin was glad to do any trick demanded of him, only not to face again the man who had caught him.

Such was Costa. But once a bear was tamed he lost all interest in the animal, hated him, spat at him when he passed the tree at which the beast was chained. And during the long Winter nights he would tell stories at the inn to the pipe-smoking peasants, stories of other days, when bears were really fierce beasts, when it took weeks of cunning to get them and months to tame them and when every bear-dancer caught and tamed his own bear, when the bears in the Carpathians were bears and men were men and not as now, when bears are tame kittens and men are old women.

And it so happened that none of Costa's own sons was worthy of his father. They could teach fine enough tricks to the bears after they were tamed by the old man; they could drive a good bargain with another Gipsy coming to buy a bear but they did not have the nose, could not scent a bear's hole and never dared what their father dared. In time they all left their father and settled each in a separate gully to ply his trade of bear-tamer.

COSTA would have despaired of life altogether because of his offspring if not for the only daughter by one of his wives, a clean-limbed half-wild woman, half Tatar and half Cherkez, whom he had bought from a horse-selling Gipsy chief and who had died when her daughter was yet very young. And that daughter of his, Margarita, with the straight clean limbs of her mother and the sharp, angular, almost Egyptian features of her father, was Costa's pride.

She was too young to go a-hunting like her father, or with him, but she could tame a mature bear almost as quickly and thoroughly as he could. She had started with the cubs her father brought when she was not yet eight years old. When she was ten, cubs, grown bears on a chain in the gully, were disgustingly easy for her, and even some of the beasts her father brought dragging at the end of a rope were unworthy of her attention, unless they were of the real kind, fierce and full of fight.

Then, oh then, life held some charms.

"Come, Margarita," her father would call to her. "This one looks like a real one."

Bare-legged, disheveled, the Gipsy girl would face the bear, cowhide whip in her bare brown arm, and try him. And if he showed fight she danced for joy, she hugged and kissed her father, tore at his mustache and bit hair from his beard.

"*Tatuca, tatuca*, it's a real one this time!"

And for days and days, from early morning to late at night, it mattered not whether a dozen wild-eyed buyers clamored to see the chief, or it snowed, or brother fought brother with knives and whips, father and daughter remained with the real one in the private school.

They emerged only when the work was done. Thinner, with eyes sparkling, arms and legs scarred and with pride in work accomplished, father or daughter would call to one of the would-be buyers:

"Take him out and give him some water. He will eat out of your hands."

And he would. The sight of any two-legged animal was enough to drive fear into any graduate of Costa's and his daughter's private school.

Then the father would say to his daughter:

"That was yours." Or, "It was mine."

No compliments were exchanged. There was no contradiction on that score. Instinctively each of them knew by whom and

when, at what stroke of the whip, the thing was accomplished.

When Margarita was fourteen years old it so happened that her father's catches that Spring had been only *mortaciunas*, dead ones, kittens. It was a pity to waste cowhide on them. The Winter had been a very long one after a very wet Fall and the bears were so weak from prolonged hibernation and hunger that they looked more like sheep than man-eating beasts.

Margarita had hoped every day for a "real live one." But no. *Mortaciunas* they were, every one of them. While her father was away she stalked, whip in hand, from one bear to the other, teased them, hit them, now gave them pieces of raw meat to awaken their taste for blood, lassoed the playful cubs from their mothers to stir their savagery, but of no avail.

Occasionally some female would shoot out a paw and give a tug at the chain, one end of which was dangling from a ring pierced through the nose. Margarita's hopes would rise and she would scream her joy in a dozen endearing names, yet a second application of the whip would hardly stir the bear from its place.

And when the Spring came to a close and the bears left the gullies and valleys and climbed the tops of the mountains for sheep, deer and wild goat, father and daughter had no excitement that season. The taming done and most of the bears sold, Costa went a-browsing from inn to inn, from village to village, drinking, carousing, playing cards and fighting with other Gipsies, sometimes on the Rumanian side of the mountains and at other times on the Hungarian side, working up some excitement for himself by outwitting the frontier guards posted on either side of the Carpathians.

He returned home once in a while to inquire how things went; if any of the bears needed private schooling. But if such a thing had come to pass Margarita had already attended to it and there was nothing more to be done.

Margarita was far from being satisfied. She could have picked quarrels with her brothers, who came occasionally to visit her, or with the husbands of her half-sisters, but they were all "old women," well-fed, satisfied traders. Nor was there any fun in quarreling with the Tziganes who came to buy tamed bears. She threw insults to their teeth.

"Why don't you hunt for your own bears? You only want tame bears because you are tame men yourselves. You are tame men yourselves."

They did not answer her. They told her she had pretty eyes and beautiful teeth, that her arms were round and brown. Some playfully inquired how she would like it if they would buy her from her father. But that was all.

"Sell me to you? Sell me to you? Sell a tiger to a lamb. I would tear you to pieces. No, I would not. I would just spit at you. Like that, *na, ptui.*"

"Well, no, I would not buy you. I would not take you for a gift," she was answered.

"Of course you would not. You are afraid. I dare you. You are afraid. You buy tame bears. This one here, I tamed him. You could eat from one plate with him now. Or better buy this one here. He was born tame. As you were. His father was a lamb as yours was. That's the kind you want. You buy them tamed. Even your women you buy tamed. Why don't you hunt for them? You are afraid. You buy them at the end of a rope. Tied, cowed."

She teased, she dared. In vain. Men looked at her from the corner of an eye but avoided her and no one ever inquired seriously of her father whether she was for sale or not.

ONE early morning, the time of the year leaves were fluttering in the brumal air, when frost, the shadow of Winter, sits on the fox grapes and plums, Petrackio, the son of Ursu the bear-tamer, entered the gully where was the home of Costa and his daughter.

Ursu the bear-tamer was an old competitor of Costa's. His establishment was twenty miles from there. The two bear-tamers were deadly enemies and it was known if the two should ever meet alone in the mountains but one would return. That Ursu's son, Petrackio, should venture to Costa's gully was the height of audacity. What brought him there was the fact that his father had been away for more than two weeks and none had seen him.

Sure that Costa had killed him, the boy came to avenge his father. Petrackio and Margarita had never seen each other. The

young Gipsy prowled about the camp for a little while without seeing any one. It was Sunday. Suddenly he saw Margarita, who had come out of the tent, and yawned as she stretched her arms high over her head.

"Hey, you!" he called to her. "Is your father dead or is he hibernating already?"

"No," she answered; "he is milking the goat for babies who have lost themselves in the mountains."

As she spoke she came nearer to the young Gipsy and looked him straight in the eye. It was a new face. They boy stood straight, with feet well apart, neck bent forward, and lips drawn away from the teeth. Margarita was thrilled. It was a "live one," one that should fight the whole Summer. She had longed for a bear who would not tame easily and she almost ran for her whip after one good look at the boy who squared himself before her. She had never before seen a face that promised more fight, more sport, than the one before her.

"And who are you?" he asked the girl as he returned her fierce glances.

"I am Costa's daughter," she answered, without moving an inch from where she stood.

"And who are you? Have you come to buy a tame bear, a very tame bear?" she mocked, "one who dances as soon as you say '*Martino*,' like this, like that?"

"I want none of your puppets. When I want a bear I go and get him in his lair with my bare hands," the youth answered.

Then after a while he continued, narrowing his eyes as he spoke:

"So you are Margarita, Costa's daughter! So you are Margarita! So—so! The daughter of that Cherkez woman. So—so! Well, I am Petrackio, Ursu's son. And I have come for revenge. Where is your father?"

Margarita knew well what the trouble was. She also knew that her father had been away to the Dobrudja more than a month and had returned only the night before. She could have said so and assured Petrackio. Instead of that she laughed loudly, tossing her head this way and that, hissing afterward between her teeth, with neck stretching out toward the boy:

"Why don't you wait another twenty years, when my father will be lame and blind, and fight him? Why, it was between old men, Ursu's son. If you want to fight, why not fight me?"

"You, a girl?"

It drew fire. In a flash Margarita was in her tent and back. She held her whip in one hand when she returned. Her body was as taut as a steel spring.

"So, that's what you think of me? Not good enough to fight with? I will show you who I am."

Chained to a stout tree, not far from where they were, a huge brown she-bear was standing on its haunches and grunting. Before Petrackio had known what had happened Margarita, with one tug at the chain, had torn the ring from the nose of the bear. Bellowing from the depths of its lungs the bleeding animal charged ahead, kicking, pawing, shaking its head viciously back and forth as it charged the girl whose only weapon was the cowhide whip in her hand.

When the bear had approached near enough she let the whip fall upon its head again and again. Her arm worked like a piston rod. The bear repeated its charge yet the girl gave no ground, but kept on whipping the beast over the head until it reeled and retreated to seek shelter behind the tree where it had been fastened.

"Will you fight me now?" Margarita asked, turning savagely on the boy who had not moved from his place.

"No," he answered. "I won't fight a woman."

"It is because you are afraid. You want to fight an old man."

"Afraid, I? Have you never heard of Petrackio? I will fight a dozen of your brothers. The whole tribe of your men."

"We have no men, only old women; fight me if you dare. Here, I begin," and Margarita brought her whip across the boy's face.

It was as if a thousand bees had suddenly stung the boy. It was as if a swiftly turning wheel had suddenly been set on fire. Before Margarita had had time to know what happened her whip had been jerked loose from her hand and she was thrown face downward in the dirt. Petrackio's knee was between her shoulders, holding her down as one holds a squirming, wriggling, stinging snake.

Margarita felt the cold steel blade as it touched the back of her neck and thought the last breath was near.

"Snake! I will not kill you. I don't kill women. I want your father to know that I

have been here. You shall tell him. And lest you forget I shall take your tresses as a reminder."

WHEN Margarita finally rose from the ground she felt the cold wind on her bare neck. Petrackio had cut off her tresses and was already on his horse galloping homeward at full gallop. She looked after him and screamed. She shook her fists and stamped her feet and devised a thousand tortures for him and his father as soon as she should capture them. That very night she and her father were to pounce upon them in their gully and drag them to the cranny, to the private school, and teach them to dance. Ah! He would pay for that dearly! She would chain him herself, pass a ring through his upper lip, as she did to bears, and teach him tricks.

And afterward—ah, afterward—he would know who Margarita was. She ran to her tent, looked at herself in the silver-handled mirror her father had given her once, and screamed again. He had cut off her hair! The coward! Better should he have killed her!

How could she ever show herself now? She would have to stay in her hut the whole Winter; avoid being seen by any one. Oh, why had he not killed her? He would pay for that. Oh, he would pay! She stampeded the dogs and grazing horses and in her excitement tore through the camp like a whirlwind.

A while later she blew the horn to call her father only too eager to start the journey of revenge. But when she saw her father descending the nearest mountain she went into the tent, and, covering her head with a colored shawl, a *basma*, she pretended to Costa that she had called him because she was so wretchedly annoyed. She did not mention Petrackio's visit.

"What's the *basma* on your head?" Costa asked.

"Washed my hair, *tatuca*."

"What do you want, Margarita? Why have you called me? Here, what is the matter with that bear there? Bleeding, I see, and loose too. By all the devils! Margarita, what have you been up to?"

"Oh, leave him. He is like a kitten again. Leave him, father. Why don't you ever get real ones again? When Spring comes I go with you hunting."

"But what has happened to the bear, Margarita? Has he thrown you? Did you call me because you were afraid now that the beast is loose? Speak, you she-devil."

"Afraid! I? Here."

And she went close to the bear.

"But then why have you called me suddenly?"

"Oh, because I want you to take me to the village."

"So, so; well, that's different! Let's close up this *martino* until we come back, and let us go. Saddle my horse, Margarita, while you saddle yours." As he spoke Costa roped the bear and dragged it to a fissure in the mountain for which a revolving rock served as a door.

"That's women. They are all alike when the time comes. Their feet burn. They want to go and come. She, too, like the rest," muttered Costa as he finished his job.

Father and daughter were not loquacious. Seclusion breeds silence. Margarita rode on her small horse, following at a few paces from her father's mount. As she rode on she thought of him, of Petrackio. Of course he was a real one. But was she herself a real one? How he had knocked the whip from her hand and thrown her to the ground! It had come with such suddenness and force that she did not know how it had been done.

But she still felt the grip of his fingers on her arm, the hardness of his knee between her shoulders and the quick hot breath as he spoke to her while she was at his mercy.

"Snake! I don't kill women. I want your father to know that I have been here."

That was bravery. She would fight him, him alone. She would tame him. But not like that, not as one tames a bear. That was not the way. He was a man.

By the time they had reached the marketplace of the village Margarita had reconstructed the whole episode of the morning a hundred times and had judged carefully her and his actions. She had very little to reproach herself with. She had acted as she should have. And he? He . . . No. He should have killed her. No. No. That would not have been the right thing. To cut off her hair, to provoke her father by the insult, was greater bravery.

By the time they had tethered their horses to the trees in front of the inn Margarita had weighed him carefully in her mind and decided that he was a real one.

Not a word to her father. She would

take care of all that herself. All alone. Costa had a grudge to settle with Ursu. That was all his affair. The grudge between herself and Petrackio was a separate thing.

"Whoa, look who is here!" several peasants called out loudly at Costa's appearance at the inn. "And here is his daughter, Margarita. Come in, come in. *Fata mare*, come in and let us look at your eyes," said the innkeeper, being seconded by the *popa*, the priest of the village.

"Still training cubs, girl, *fata mare?*" Popa Jancu asked, trying to pinch Margarita's arm.

"Cubs!" called out Costa. "Cubs! She is taming the wildest quite as well as I can." And, growing suddenly very proud of his daughter: "Better, even better, I say. She may sit among men at the inn and everywhere. Sit near me, Margarita, here. Bring wine, the oldest, Calin, you swindling innkeeper, and set glasses, big glasses, Hungarian fashion, for each of us, including my daughter." And turning to Margarita, he said: "And if you want music, I will send a messenger to bring Yancu Lautauru, or any one you like best to hear. No? As you wish it to be."

"Ursu has gone by, an hour ago," said the innkeeper Calin as he filled the glasses.

"And why do you tell me that?" broke out Costa in a rage. "Have I ever inquired about him, what?"

"No, Costa, but he was bitten by a snake while he was in the mountains. He had to cut off one of his toes—he may lose his right foot—it swells so rapidly and he is lame, maybe forever," said the innkeeper.

"Is that so? Tell us more. What do you know about it?" the peasants asked, curious for further information.

"That's all I know. I sold him some pure brandy. It's good to have it near oneself before the end comes," the innkeeper added. "He looks old and worn, and is bent like a twig after a hailstorm."

"Well that's different, Calin, that's different," Costa muttered as he sat down again and began to bite off the ends of his long beard as he always did when he had to suppress great rage. "And do you say he will remain lame for life, Calin?"

"Looks to me that way."

Father and daughter's eyes met. She knew how he hated Ursu. He looked at her and she understood. He was being cheated of his revenge. He could not fight a lame man. He did not know what her look said. He was blinded by his own rage against men and bears and life itself. Life was becoming too tame an affair. Men were tame. Bears were tame. No fights. No wolves. No robbers. No women were stolen. Ursu had been the only man and now he was lame.

"Has a fine lad for a son, Ursu has," the *popa* said as he looked at Margarita and winked to the rest of the assemblage. "He is a better hunter than his father."

"That's not very much," said Costa.

They all laughed at the sally and punched the Gipsy in the ribs.

"Well, no, it's not so at all," explained the *popa*. "He is as strong a boy as there is within fifty miles of here. Quiet and strong, and good too. And he can tame a bear as well as anybody. I ought to know!"

It was only on rare occasions that the *popa* thus revealed the fact that he was himself the son of a bear-tamer. It was plain that the Popa favored Petrackio.

"Well, be that as it may," said Costa, "but I bet a gold-piece that Margarita could throw him."

"No, no, no," many voices rose at once.

"I bet a hundred gold-pieces."

"You might as well bet a thousand!" the *popa* exclaimed. "I know the boy too well. He won't wrestle a girl."

"But I tell you that she can throw any man," Costa argued as the wine began to have its effect. He was a bad drinker and was becoming boisterous and quarrelsome after a few drinks.

"Well, Calin, it's all your fault. Giving news about some one at least one of the party is not interested in," said an old peasant as he made ready to leave the table.

"That's so. Miron is right," seconded Costa as he rose from his chair. "Here I come ready to drink and have some music, talk with friends and please my daughter when he finds nothing else to tell me but that Ursu had gone by. Here, take your money from this gold-piece. Come, daughter. Good night, men."

And Costa stalked out of the inn before anybody had left the place.

MARGARITA rode silently near her father. Like a flock of golden sheep the rays of the sun broke and scattered themselves on the cold, silver mountain-peaks. From time to time an

awkward movement of some animal disturbed some stone or boulder which rolled down the mountainside, filling the valley with sharp echoes that died in dull, hollow thuds as they ended in the valleys.

Suddenly Costa began to sob. He cried easily after a glass of wine. It was his weakest spot. And as he cried it seemed as if all the mountains cried with him, felt his sorrow and wept with him. Margarita sped her horse up, awakened from her own dreams.

"Why have you waited twenty years?" she reproached her father, knowing the reason for his sorrow. "If I had a grudge to settle I would not wait that long. The same day, the same day, or a day later at most."

"Oh, it was a bad year. A bad year," moaned Costa. "Without a wife. Bears tame as kittens and Ursu lame, lame, lame! Oh! Oh! It was a bad year, a bad year, daughter."

"You don't even catch a live one now," the daughter reproached him again. "Is it because you are getting old? Or are bears and men all tame now? You cry like a woman. Listen, the mountain cries too. Shame!"

"I old? I old? You are crazy. The bears were tame last year. Too long a Winter. Too long. Without a wife, and Ursu lame," and the old man sobbed again. "Let the mountains cry with me. They understand, they understand."

It was pitch darkness by the time they had reached their gully, and Costa stretched himself on the straw-pile as soon as he let the flap of his tent fall back again.

Margarita stabled, watered and fed the horses before she thought again of herself. She touched her neck and felt again with her fingers the place where her heavy tresses had been cut off. She thought of him and cursed him for the insult.

Yet although it seemed to her that she still felt the grip of his steel-like fingers on her flesh she had no desire to free herself, no desire to shake off the illusion of a sharp knee that pressed down her shoulders; and between a thousand curses and tears of rage she saw Petrackio's sharp features, the eyes set well apart, the small ears set back firmly, the mouth and nose and forehead bespeaking courage and decision.

Margarita could not sleep. As she reviewed again what had happened in the morning she regretted that she had not used the whip on Petrackio more than she had done. It would have been much better, she thought. He should know that Costa's daughter was not a plaything. He would have gone home and found his father had returned. Petrackio would have come to see her. It would have been well he should have known that Costa's daughter was not to be trifled with. She should have used the whip more rapidly. It might have saved her long tresses.

She tried to place in her memory the exact instant the boy had knocked the whip out of her hand and thrown her to the ground. She was doubtlessly in his power then, absolutely in his power. He could have done what he pleased with her—he could have killed her.

As she sat on the ground in front of her tent she suddenly heard the beat of a horse's hoofs at a distance. Margarita listened and when she was sure the rider came toward the gully she entered her tent. The hoof-beats soon ceased. A dog barked. After that she heard a sharp, long, penetrating whistle. Margarita's ears, accustomed to catch the sounds, soon knew that the birds in the surrounding chestnut-trees were scenting danger. The flight of a chipmunk told her that the intruder was within sight of the camp.

Again the dog barked; just one short yelp and no more. Some one had thrown him a piece of raw meat. She had heard the flop of it as it fell to the ground. Then some one whistled softly from very near. Margarita hardly contained herself for joy.

It was Petrackio. He was a real one and she was taming him! It was the old sensation of taming live bears with a thousand new thrills added. She forgot all about the loss of her tresses. What did they amount to when weighed against such pleasure?

Something in her urged her to rush out to the man and have a talk with him. But something stronger held her back, gave promise of greater pleasure if she but sit quiet and watch the taming. It was like drinking good wine in small gulps to prolong the pleasure, to permeate oneself with the exquisite taste.

She heard the whistling again and again and every time she heard the shrill sound it was the sweetest music to her ears. Not the loudest howl from the fiercest bear she had ever tamed could compare to that. He, Petrackio, was a real one, and she was

taming him. And not with a cowhide whip. Not with red-hot coals and a piece of sheet iron on which the bear was compelled to dance. No, no, with another weapon, an invisible weapon, a sharper and more potent one.

She would have screamed for joy but she controlled herself. Silence added to the sting of the weapon. More than that. It was the weapon.

DAYLIGHT was coming in through rents in the canvas of the tent. A few last screeches of a preying owl, then the clicking of wild pheasants proclaimed that the sun was peeping over the mountaintops, like a red-faced boy over a high garden fence. He, Petrackio, was calling her. He was calling her. But she would not answer.

There was a last appeal in an "Oho, oho!" coming from behind her tent, then there was silence for a while. After that, and before there were too many sounds in the valley, Margarita heard the hoof-beats of a departing horse. Tired, feverish, she fell asleep.

"Ho, ho, ho!" She awoke suddenly, hearing her father's voice outside her tent. "The sun has gone to Hungary and you are still sleeping! Was the wine too strong for you? What?"

"Yes, no, yes, no, *tatuca*. Let me sleep. I want to sleep. My head aches."

"That comes from washing your hair too often," the father answered before leaving. After that he muttered to himself, "When the time comes, they are all like that."

She heard her father approach her tent several times before nightfall but she made believe that she was fast asleep. He left some food near her cot. But, as in the days when they had a real one to tame, she felt no hunger, only a horrible thirst. An hour after sunset Margarita was listening for the hoof-beats. She heard none.

Her pain was now sharper than yesterday's joy. She waited and listened until midnight. Not a sound. She went out of her tent and looked at the sky. Her whip, the weapon in which she had had so much confidence all the years, was at her feet. She scorned it now. It was a weapon as crude as a child's plaything.

After she had waited and listened for many weary hours she whistled loud and long. The sound reverberated, thrown from one mountain wall to the other and back, until it died in some distant gully. It was like the call of some wild animal.

She waited silently. There was no answer to her call. But when she lifted the flap of her tent at daybreak she found the two braided tresses lying across the cot. Startled, shocked, mad, speechless, Margarita took one of the tresses in each hand and rushed out again. Nobody to be seen. The dog was peacefully licking his chops. Wild-eyed, the girl looked around her. Seized by an uncontrollable rage, she went for her whip and began to lash the dog with its thongs.

"So, ha, ha, you will let thieves go and come as they please, will you, will you, ha? Take this and take that."

"Why do you hit the dog?" asked Costa, coming out of his tent, awakened by the animal's howls.

"Why? Why? Because, look, look! Look at my hair. Some one has entered my tent and sheared them off while I was asleep. And he did not move, did not bark, nothing."

"What? What is that?" Costa screamed. "Who did that? Who did that? If I did not know that Ursu was lame, by fire and water! Margarita—my poor girl—my poor girl—who could have done it? I will go to the end of the world to find him."

"A thief, a coward, a triple coward, one who dared not fight me in daylight," screamed Margarita at the top of her voice, knowing that Petrackio could not be too far to hear her words.

Costa was soon on his horse.

"I shall not return before finding the thief, the coward," was all he said before riding away.

Costa was hardly out of sight when Petrackio showed himself emerging from behind a tree only a few paces behind the girl.

"Well, I heard you calling me a while ago, so I arrived astride an eagle and dropped your tresses on your cot through the air-hole on top of your tent. Why have you called me?"

"Called you? I called you?"

"I heard your whistle!"

"That was for the dog."

"Be it as you say," Petrackio grinned. "Well then, I may go, Costa's daughter. I gave you back what I took from you." He turned to leave her. "I was sorry,

afraid that your father might beat you."

"Did I ask my hair back from you? No. I did not."

"I thought you might want them back," he said banteringly, without looking at the girl, "and, as I happened to pass this way I just dropped them in the tent."

"You lie; you came on purpose," answered Margarita.

She felt a sudden pang as she saw the deep gash her whip had cut in the boy's face. They looked each other over. The glint of his eyes gripped her eyes even more strongly than his steely fingers had gripped her a day before. The sound of a galloping horse was coming nearer and nearer. Her father was returning. She looked at Petrackio. He too had heard the hoof-beats yet there was no trace of fear on his face.

Margarita watched the boy's face while she measured the nearing sound of the hoof-beats. Her father must have entered the mouth of the gully. Petrackio knew that as well as she did yet he did not move a foot. He looked at her steadily. When she had heard her father's voice talking to the horse and seen that the boy had made no move to leave, to hide between the trees, she called to him, trembling with fear:

"Hide, for ——'s sake, hide. He comes."

"I will wait for you on Sunday at the inn," Petrackio said quietly before vanishing behind a tree.

And as the bear-tamer's daughter passed by the tree to which a bear was chained she felt that she herself was as a bear that had been tamed, or a trainer that had been tamed by a real live bear, tamed to do the master's will, yet she was already unhappy, thinking of the long days and long nights between then and Sunday.

Author of "The Other Side," "Barbed Wire," etc.

FIVE days from San Francisco the British steamer *Sussex Bride* sighted a small boat in which were three men, one still living and the other two dead. The boat, on which was painted the name *El Dorado*, was hoisted on board the *Sussex Bride*. The man who was alive was wrapped in blankets and dosed with warm brandy and water; the men who were dead were sewn up in canvas and buried.

That same evening the eastward-bound mail-boat came up and the *Sussex Bride*, not being equipped with wireless, hoisted many flags and painfully spelled out news of the disaster to the *El Dorado* and of the rescue of the man, Drixley.

At four bells in the first watch the captain looked into the spare berth where the survivor of the *El Dorado* was sleeping.

"How is he?" he asked.

"'Ell get better, sir," said the steward. "But 'e's been talkin' to hisself about the ship bein' afire."

The captain waited. Presently the man in the bunk began to speak in a low tone:

"My ——! He's dead. I've killed him!"

"'E ain't said that before," said the steward.

NEXT morning Drixley opened his eyes and asked for some one called Trander. Then he seemed to sense something wrong.

"Where am I?" he said. "Good ——, the ship was on fire!"

Later in the day he told the captain that he had been a passenger on the *El Dorado* and that his name was Smith. The captain, remembering the name Drixley in the pocketbook, did not argue.

Twenty-four hours afterward, followed by the steward who protested that he was "doin' 'isself 'arm," Drixley staggered on deck, and, holding on to a stanchion, looked about him with curious, worried eyes.

"Captain," he said, nodding astern toward the setting sun, "are we headed east?"

"Didn't I tell you we were bound for San Francisco?" said the captain. "Why, what's wrong?"

Drixley assured him there was nothing wrong; nevertheless he could not hide the horror in his face and voice. He was quite a young man, very much burnt by his exposure in the open boat, very thin and worn, with hollows in his cheeks and eyes unnaturally bright. The captain decided that he liked him; all the same he was puzzled.

"Drixley," he said suddenly, "what made you say your name was Smith?"

Drixley shot a startled glance at him.

"I must have been dreamin' if I said that. Drixley's my name. California's my State. I'm a rancher."

"Ah!" said the captain, who had read many books about the Wild West. "Cattle, cow-punchers, round-ups."

"A few head uh cattle maybe," said Drixley; "otherwise hogs, alfalfa, wheat. I do purty well, an' I guess I'll do better still as soon as a deal I got——"

He broke off with a kind of choking noise in his throat.

"I ain't as strong as I thought."

"You'd better turn in," said the captain.

And all through the first watch he paced to and fro on the upper bridge, wondering what grim terror it was that haunted Drixley.

THE night before the *Sussex Bride* reached the Golden Gate there was a tap at the door of the chart-room.

"Come in," growled the captain.

Drixley stood at the threshold.

"May I speak to you a moment, captain?"

"Take a seat, Mr. Drixley. What's amiss?"

Drixley dropped on to the plush-covered settee and began to talk.

"Captain," he said, "you're takin' me back where I come from. I left San Francisco because I killed a man. Yes, it's the truth—one evening down by the waterfront, China Basin way. I was standin' on the edge uh the wharf, lookin' across at Oakland, when I heard some one at the back uh me. I turned quick an' there was Palling yankin' out his gun.

"I grabbed an iron bar an' hit him just as he fired. He was crazy, I guess, but that didn't make no diff'rence. I'd killed him. I can't get the sight uh him out uh my mind, layin' there with his mouth open——"

"But," said the captain slowly, "you did it in self-defense, didn't you?"

"I ain't sure sometimes. My head aches if I try to think too much. He'd no reasons fer sayin' I'd ruined him, neither. Yuh see, captain, he'd always been kind uh jealous. Palling wasn't a worker—I was. I went ahead—he didn't.

"One day he come an' wanted to buy my ranch. He was too anxious. He tried again an' again. It was oil, uh course. He'd got to hear whispers uh what was comin'. How, —— knows! But I wouldn't sell. An then a pal uh mine put me wise, an' I went to San Francisco with Palling after me."

For a time there was no sound in the chart-room but the creaking of the wheel-chains and the noise of the steam steering-gear and the rumble of the cranks in the engine-room.

Presently Drixley roused himself and went on.

"I got an offer from some uh the big int'rests an' closed the deal. Palling would uv done the same with my land if I'd let him. He was waitin' in Market Street.

" 'Hello!' I says. 'I sold the oil-rights. Thanks fer the hint.'

"Palling always had been a bit soft in the head; he purty nigh went mad right there. I'd ruined him, he said, an' he'd get even.

"Mebbe I made a mistake, laughin' at him, but honest, captain, I never give him another thought. I hadn't nothin' to do fer an hour or two an' I went fer a walk round the water-front. An' then—why, then, Palling come up an' tried to kill me. When I seen he was dead, I got scairt an' beat it.

"That night I met a friend, captain uh the *El Dorado*, an' went aboard. Yuh know the rest, don't yuh? I'm goin' back to San Francisco. Fate, ain't it? I'd be obliged, captain, if you'd send fer the police soon's we get there."

"Worst of it is," said the captain, "the day we picked you up I signaled the mail-boat to say you were safe—they'd pass it on by wireless."

Drixley laughed.

"Clinched it, I guess."

"Mr. Drixley," said the captain, "there's always a chance. If you'd care to try it—You needn't tell *me*, you know."

Drixley shook his head.

"No, cap, I can't dodge what's comin'. I got away in the *El Dorado*—burnt. I get picked up by the *Sussex Bride*, bound fer San Francisco. Yuh tell the mail-boat yuh got me. Don't it look like fate, hey?

"They'll know it was me killed Palling. I went around leavin' clues a-plenty. There was my hat with my name in it. I dropped that, —— knows where; but when I got back to the Embarcadero I was bare-headed. Palling killed—me the last person he was seen with—me missin'. No, sir; no use dodgin'. I'm goin' back, an' then——"

He smiled grimly.

"*Quien sabe*——"

THE captain of the *Sussex Bride* was not happy; the thought of what might happen to Drixley depressed him.

Yet the meeting between the detectives and Drixley, soon after the *Sussex Bride* was tied up alongside the pier, was not quite what he had pictured. Afterward he had a confused impression in his mind that half the officials of the port of San Francisco, medical, immigration and customs, plain-clothes detectives, newspapermen, representatives of the British consul-general, the consignees, the ship's agents, as well as one of the owners of the schooner *El Dorado* and various weeping relatives of the *El Dorado* crew, had managed to force their way past the steward into the little mess-room where every one had talked and it was impossible to make out who they all were and what business they had on board his ship.

To the captain the most perplexing part of the whole affair was that the detectives had to be persuaded to take Drixley away. One of them, a big man with a round face, asked why he had sent for them.

"I sent word we had Drixley for you, though—you must have known——"

"I don't understand," said the round-faced man.

No one else seemed to understand, either.

And then Drixley said that he had killed Palling and that they had better arrest him. The detectives looked at him as if they thought he was crazy. They knew he had been saved from the *El Dorado*, but who was Palling? Some one said, wasn't Palling the man who was missing? His wife had been making inquiries. And at last after a good deal of arguing it was decided to do as Drixley asked.

Drixley seemed relieved by the decision.

"I killed him anyway," he said.

The crew of the *Sussex Bride* crowded the rail to watch him go ashore.

"Good-by all," he said. "So long, cap. Thanks fer what yuh done."

"Good-by," said the captain. "An' best of luck."

Drixley turned away. All at once he stopped.

"My ——!" he said in a strangled tone. "Look!"

He pointed to a shabby-looking man with a white face and stubbly black beard, a mean-looking man with mean eyes.

"Jack!" said the man with the stubbly beard. "Jack!"

His voice broke.

"You—you keep off, —— yuh! Keep off!"

"It's Palling," shouted Drixley. "Palling, gol-darn him—alive!"

He grabbed at Palling's throat and shook him till he began to screech.

"What happened?"

"You leave me alone. Stop him. I been through ——. You hit me—I didn't do nothin'. Ow! You're chokin' me. When I come to, Jack, you wasn't there—only yer hat—an' I—I thought yuh was dead an' fallen into the water——"

"An' what made yuh think that, yuh liar? Tell me or I'll croak yuh."

"Because uh my gun— Ow! You're killin' me——"

"Yuh shot at me, you dod-blasted crook!"

Drixley still held him by the throat, and not even the round-faced man made any move to interfere.

"Shot at me——"

"Yeh, I shot at yuh—an'—an' I thought yuh was dead, Jack. Yuh done me enough harm—lemme go! I been hidin' ever since, an' I—I read in the paper yuh was picked up—an' I been waitin' to make sure."

"I wouldn't be surprized by nothin'," said the captain of the *Sussex Bride*. "Not even if it was to rain rubies—not even if we were to get a charter for home."

COCHISE

By Frederick R. Bechdolt

Author of "John Slaughter's Way," "One Against Many."

NOTE—As you know, we seldom break our habit of printing fiction stories only: You prefer fiction on the whole, and in our magazine's field it is particularly difficult to insure an article's being absolutely true to fact. Occasionally we have ventured an exception, without at all abandoning the rule. We do so in the case of this series of articles on prominent figures in the development of the West, believing that the author's standing is sufficient guarantee of trueness to essential fact and that your long displayed interest in our country's early history is sufficient warrant.—A. S. H.

DARKNESS had settled down upon the wide mesquite flat, smoothing off all irregularities, hiding outlines until the tallest thickets were but deeper shadows merging into the lesser shades of the open places. Only one object showed, a Sibley tent glowing from the light within.

Under the flaming yellow stars it stood out, luminous, marking the exact center of an enormous circle; a circle roofed by the radiantly flecked heavens, bounded by mountains which rose against the sky-line, abrupt as a wall, black as ink. In the different segments of this far-flung ring the peaks of the Chiracahuas, the Grahams, the Dragoons and the Galiuros betrayed their ranges by varying outlines.

But to the eye they all formed portions of one huge circumference, whose center was a glowing point, the Sibley tent.

On the translucent walls of canvas there

was a weird design of black shadows, a design which was constantly shifting and taking on new shapes. And as the shadows moved, sometimes with grotesque effect and swiftly, sometimes slowly, voices filtered through the gleaming cloth to mingle with the whispering of the night wind in the bear grass, the dull stamping of tethered horses, the intermittent jingling of bit chains and the steady soft footfalls of two sentries.

The voices changed as often as the shadows on the tent wall; now it was the abrupt, clipping speech of a white man and now the deep inflectionless bass of an Indian. But most often it was the droning monotone of the post interpreter, uttering his translations in English or in the tongue of the Apache.

Of what was taking place within those luminous walls of canvas, official records still exist; and of what followed there are whole volumes of further records in Washington. Dry reading in themselves, they hold the meat of a remarkable story, a story whose colorful narration has been given by its own main characters and thus has come down among the true chronicles of the old-timers.

On that evening in 1859 two groups of men faced each other and the lantern which hung on the center-pole of the Sibley tent shone down on their faces, revealing the growing passion in their eyes. One of the groups was composed of soldiers, wearing the blue uniforms, the queer straight-vizored caps and the huge wide-topped boots which our cavalry used during those times; a guard of sunburnt troopers under a hard-bitten non com; and standing a pace or so ahead of them, a young second lieutenant fresh from West Point; Lieutenant Bascom, a stranger in a strange, harsh land, just a little puzzled over the complications which he saw arising here, but dead sure of himself and intolerant of the men with whom he was treating. That intolerance showed in his stare as he regarded them.

There were half a dozen of the Apaches, chiefs every one of them, a ragged group clad in a mixture of their native garb and cast-off clothes of the white man; frowzy hair hanging to their shoulders and bound round at the brows by soiled thin turbans. But they stood erect and there was a dignity in the way they held their heads back, a dignity in their immobility of feature and in their slow, grave speech. It was the dignity of men who knew that they were leaders of their people; who felt themselves on entire equality with the leader of the white man's warriors; who felt the gravity of this occasion where they had been invited into conference with this blue-clad representative of a mighty Government. Their headman was Cochise.

Like Lieutenant Bascom, he stood a pace ahead of his followers, a lean Apache, with a thinner face than most of his tribesmen and a remarkably high forehead. And as he looked into the eyes of the young man in blue who had just come from the far cities of the east coast there began to come into his own eyes the shadow of suspicion. The talk went on; the interpreter droned out one answer after another to his speeches and that shadow in the eyes of Cochise deepened.

In itself the matter at issue was a small one. A settler had lost a cow and he had accused the Apaches of stealing the animal. Young Lieutenant Bascom had summoned the chiefs to conference and they had come —they said—to help him find the culprit. After the manner of the Indian, of whose troubles the passing of time is the very least, they talked slowly, listened to the interpreter's renditions of the lieutenant's answers, and then talked more.

They did not know the man who had stolen the cow; that was the sum and substance of their speeches. And Lieutenant Bascom, fretting with the passage of the hours, looked on the ragged group in their dirty nondescript garments and chafed with fresh intolerance.

Cochise read that intolerance in the eyes of the smooth-cheeked officer and being an Apache, managed to conceal the suspicion in his own eyes. He did not want trouble with the white man. He had never yet had trouble with soldier or settler. Ever since he had been a chief among the Chiracahua Apaches he had held down the turbulent spirits in his portion of the tribe; he had outintrigued savage politicians and had smoothed over more than one difficulty like this. As a matter of fact he was assimilating some of the white man's ways; he was getting into business; working a crew of his people at wood-cutting, selling cordwood to the stage company at the Stein's Pass station. He was doing well, saving money, and saw ahead of him the time

when he would own many cattle, like some of the settlers.

All of this was very comfortable and to his taste, and because he liked it he held a firm stand against the suasions of warring chiefs from his and other tribes. He even came to cool terms with his relative Mangus Colorado, the greatest leader the Apaches had ever known. But while he was keeping to his position he had to listen to many an argument and many a tale of the white man's treachery, and a man can not listen often without sometimes finding himself inclined to believe.

Settler and soldier, so said Mangus Colorado and other men of parts among his people, regarded their promises to the Indians as nothing; they were forever trying to entice the Apaches into conference and then taking advantage of them—sometimes by massacre. While he argued slowly against the impatient utterances of Lieutenant Bascom, reading the growing intolerance in the other's eyes, Cochise remembered some of the stories which he had frowned down when his people told them.

THAT was the state of affairs when Lieutenant Bascom, with the cocksureness of the young and the intolerance of the Easterner for a bunch of frowzy Indians, made a decision. To him it was evident that these tattered savages were lying; they were a treacherous lot at the best, and always thieves. So, now that he was getting sick of the whole long drawn-out business, he turned from the interpreter to his sergeant.

"Arrest 'em," he said.

Cochise heard him and slipped to the rear of the tent as the troopers stepped forward. The other chiefs, who could understand no English, did not need an interpreter to tell them the meaning of this movement. At once the quiet of the Arizona night was shattered by the thud of blows and savage outcries. The crowded space within the tent was filled with struggling men.

And while that fight went on, Cochise, aflame with hatred, outraged by this violation of the sacred custom of conference, believing now every word that had been spoken to him by Mangus Colorado and the other war-chiefs, whipped out his knife. The sound of the blade as it rent the canvas was drowned by the other noises, and when Lieutenant Bascom and his breathless troopers surveyed their bound captives Cochise was in full flight across the darkened plain.

Now word was sent by courier to the agency and Government runners went forth that night to all parts of the reservation, but they found no Indians to receive their messages. The Chiracahua Apaches were already riding toward their mountains where Mangus Colorado and the renegade members of their tribe were biding on the heights, like eagles resting on the rocky peaks before they take their next flight.

Like roosting eagles the warriors of Mangus Colorado scanned the wide plains beneath the mountains. Their eyes went to the ragged summits of the ranges beyond. Now as the day was creeping across the long, flat reaches of the Sulphur Springs Valley, tipping the scarred crests of the Dragoons with light off to the west, touching the distant northern pinnacles of the Grahams with throbbing radiance, one of these lookouts beheld a thread of smoke unraveling against the bright morning sky.

Under the newly risen sun Cochise and his followers were traveling hard away off there to the northward. The turbaned warriors came on first, half-naked, armed some of them with lances, some with bows and poisoned arrows, and a goodly number bearing rifles. Their lank brown legs moved ceaselessly in rhythm with the trotting of the little ponies; their moccasined heels thudded against the flanks of the animals.

In the rear of the column the squaws rode with the children and the scanty baggage. As they traveled thus, an outrider departed from the column to leave his horse upon an arid slope and climb afoot among the rocks above until he stood outlined against the clear hot sky, kindling a wisp of flame. Now he bent over the fire, casting bits of powdered resin upon the blaze, holding a square of tattered blanket over it after the first puff of black smoke had risen, feeding it then with a scattering of green leaves which in their turn gave forth a cloud of white fumes.

And so the smoke thread unwound its length, showing itself in black and white; spelling forth, by the same system of dot and dash which the white man employs in his telegraph, the tidings of what had taken place back there in the Sibley tent.

FROM his nook in the Chiracahuas the watching warrior read its message. And long before the first faint haze of mounting dust betrayed the approach of the fugitives, Mangus Colorado knew that his nephew and his nephew's people had quit the reservation and the rations of meat and flour to make their living henceforth as their savage forbears had made theirs as far back as the memory of the oldest traditions went—by marauding. So he gathered all his forces and welcomed Cochise into a council, where they planned their first series of raids against the white men.

In this manner Cochise reverted to the customs of his ancestors, customs which had come gradually to the Apaches when they wandered down from Athabasca, passing southward through regions held by hostile tribes, snatching their sustenance from these enemies, fleeing before superior forces of warriors, until they reached the flaming deserts down by the Mexican border, past masters of the arts of ambush and raid and retreat, owning no longer any love of home or knowledge of tepee building; nomads who made their lodges by spreading skins or blankets over the tops of bushes which they had tied together; to whom the long march had become an ingrained habit and all the arts of bloody ambush an instinctive pleasure.

Now he devoted all his mind and bent his talents to these wiles of Apache warfare; he directed his young men in making a living for the rest of the tribe by theft and murder.

His uncle, Mangus Colorado, was the most skilful leader the Apaches had ever known, a marvelously tall savage with an enormous head. Cochise learned from him and in time surpassed him as a general. For nearly a decade and a half he made a plunder ground of southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico, extending his forays away down across the line into Sonora and Chihuahua until a remarkable man among his white enemies came to him and, by a daring bit of frontier diplomacy, put an end to the bloodiest outbreak in the history of the Southwest.

But in the beginning there was neither diplomat nor general among the white men. The days before the Civil War witnessed a withdrawal of the troops from Arizona and the Apaches had things pretty much their own way. From their home in the Chiracahua Mountains they rode westward across the wide reaches of the Sulphur Springs Valley to the ridges of the Catalinas away beyond the San Pedro, then turned southward, making their way toward Mexico by the Whetstone and the Huachuca ranges.

Now, as they marched along the heights, they paused at times to send bands of warriors down into the flat lands which lie along the course of the Santa Cruz. Here were ranches and a few small settlements. It was the custom of the raiders to steal upon these places, always in force superior to that of their enemies, camouflaging themselves by bits of brush and handfuls of earth which they stuck among the folds of their turbans and spread over their bare backs until one looking at them from a distance of twenty-five yards would never suspect the presence of lurking warriors.

In this manner they lay along the roadside biding the passing of wagon-trains and stages, or crept up on ranch-houses, or wormed their way toward sleeping prospectors at the hour of dawn. And when they knew that the issue was safely in their hands they opened fire.

During the Civil War times they put the Butterfield stage line out of business and were a main factor in determining the northern route for the carrying of the U. S. mails to California; they wiped out the ranches of the valleys until cattle-raising and agriculture ceased entirely; they raided the pueblo of Tubac until its people finally fled for safety to Tucson and then they burned the deserted buildings. They made a howling waste out of southeastern Arizona.

Travel was suspended; there was no ranching and nearly every mine in this portion of the territory was abandoned. Of northern Sonora they made a source of supply for their horses and drove whole herds out of Mexico, using the surplus animals for food, keeping the rest for mounts until these knuckled under from hard treatment.

During the years that followed the Civil War those fat days came to an end. Fresh troops were sent out from Washington. Mangus Colorado was captured by a detachment of cavalry and, according to the story of one who was present, was killed in his blankets by the troopers who guarded him. White settlers, stung to reprisals by the barbarity of successive massacres, hunted down several bands of the Apaches at their rancherias and wiped them out in

night attacks, men, women and children. Cochise found himself faced with a new set of conditions and changed his tactics to meet them.

IT WAS the habit of the Apaches to rest up between the long forced marches of their raids, choosing always a spot high in the mountains where the mescal plant grew. Here they would gather the roots of the thorny vegetables, bury them in the earth, kindle roaring fires over them and bake them. From these they got the sugar which their wasted bodies needed; and during the days at these camps they gained the rest which their aching bones craved.

But the white man's cavalry, guided by scouts recruited from the Tonto Basin Apaches and from settlers who knew the country, began tracking the renegades to their aerial refuges, and sometimes massacred whole bands of them. Failing to steal upon them, the cavalry always managed to get them on the run once more, and that meant scant rations when full bellies were long overdue.

In this manner the soldiers and settlers were making the Chiracahuas too hot for Cochise and his people.

Then the war-chief led his tribe across the Sulphur Springs Valley to the northern end of the Dragoon Mountains where the peaks rise straight from the mesquite flat lands, two thousand feet of sheer walls whose summits command a view for many miles; whose pinnacles and overhanging rocks give endless opportunity for hiding and ambush. In this sanctuary they found rest between raids during the early seventies; and the place is known to this day as Cochise's Stronghold.

Here one time a force of several hundred soldiers made camp in the lowlands, and strung a series of strong outposts through Middle Pass, cutting off the northern part of the range from all the rest of the world, holding it inside a ring of armed men. It was such a siege as the warriors of the Middle Ages used to wage, starving their walled-in enemies to surrender. For weeks the soldiers bided and sometimes got glimpses of the turbaned heads of Apache warriors who were gazing down on them from the rocks above.

Then, one dark night, Cochise took his entire tribe, numbering somewhere between two and three hundred men, women and children, down the niches among the cliffs. Carrying their arms and their scanty baggage, the Apaches wormed their way from the crest to the plain two thousand feet below and crawled through the line of the besiegers. So adroitly was the thing maneuvered that no one cut their trail, and two days passed before the escape was discovered. By that time the whole band were raiding down along the headwaters of the San Pedro, getting new horses from the herds of ranchers on the border.

In the old days this northern end of the Dragoon Mountains, which towers above the flat lands of the Sulphur Springs Valley on the one side and the rolling plains of the San Pedro on the other, had been known among the Apaches as the abode of the dead. Here, they said, the departed spirits of their ancestors whispered among the granite caves and pinnacles every evening with the coming of the night wind.

But from now on they forgot the tribal legends and looked upon the place as their inviolable refuge.

Time after time the blue-clad troopers chased them as far as the base of the cliffs, but never pressed them farther. For Cochise had developed into a consummate strategist and, for the first time in their history, the Apaches learned the art of making a stand against superior forces.

To this day the rolling hills under those pinkish granite precipices show traces of the camps which the troopers occupied during successive sieges, only to abandon them on learning that their turbaned enemies had stolen away in some other quarter to resume their raiding all along the border.

In some of the cañons which lead up toward the ragged crests of naked rock one can still pick up old brass cartridge-shells, the relics of grim battles where the soldiers always found themselves at a disadvantage, targets for the frowzy, naked savages who slipped and squirmed among the granite masses above them like rattlesnakes.

Far to the southward the Sierra Madre reared its lofty crests toward the flaring sky; and there Cochise established another sanctuary where his people could rest and hunt when the chase became too hot in Arizona. There his breech-clouted scouts discovered some dry placer diggings, and he bade his people mine the dust which he

exchanged with crooked-souled white traders for ammunition.

And now, having mastered the art of flight as he had mastered the art of raiding, the war-chief of the Chiracahua Apaches waged his vendetta against the white men more remorselessly than any of his forefathers had done in their time.

But few men are absolutely consistent and Cochise had some idiosyncrasies, which it is just as well to note in passing, for they give an inkling to a side of his character that was instrumental in bringing an end to the whole bloody business.

For one thing, he could not enjoy torturing his prisoners. He tried that once on a Mexican down Agua Prieta way. After the custom of his people he pegged out the luckless prisoner near to an ant-hill, with his mouth propped open by a wooden gag and a trail of honey leading into it.

But when he settled down that night to enjoy the torments of the man, he found that pleasure would not come to him; and during the long hours that followed, the groans of the slowly dying Mexican became a punishment to his savage captor, a punishment which endured for years afterward, for in his sleep Cochise sometimes heard those moanings when he was an old man, and hearing them, sweated in agony of mind.

Another of his peculiarities was a love of the truth. He was no hand at lying like the ordinary Indian. In an era when the white men were careless with their compacts, an era when Washington set the fashion in breaking treaties with the hostile Indians, he came out with the reputation of always keeping his word.

"If you can not tell the truth," he said, "keep silent or avoid the subject."

That was the way he put it to Captain Thomas Jonathan Jeffords, to whom he also confessed the weakness which had overcome him in the case of the tortured Mexican. And the knowledge of this side of Cochise's character helped Captain Jeffords to pave the way for the wind-up of the war-chief's maraudings. That knowledge came after a long, strange intimacy which began in a remarkable manner.

THIS Captain Thomas Jonathan Jeffords owned a wagon outfit and not only contracted for government freighting in those times when teaming was a perilous venture, but rode as an express messenger for various military posts along the border. During the days when Cochise was using the northern end of the Dragoon Mountains as his stronghold, the days before these two men became acquainted, the lean brown warriors made several attacks on Jeffords' wagon-trains and on more than one occasion forced the old-timer himself to do some extremely hard riding.

Finally when he had lost fourteen employees and property amounting to thousands of dollars in ambuscades and raids, Jeffords decided that it was high time to put an end to this sort of thing as far as he was concerned. He had tried reprisals on his own account but although he and his leather-skinned followers had managed to kill off many Apaches, there were more warriors in the tribe than he could ever hope to massacre.

He had worked with the soldiers as a scout but had found the cavalry hampered by too many conflicting orders from Washington, and in some cases too inefficiently officered in high places, to be very formidable. Cochise was too much for them to handle and that was all there was about it. Now Jeffords made up his mind to try a new scheme.

Captain Jeffords had mixed a great deal with Apaches of various tribes, until he knew their customs as well as they did themselves. He could speak the sign language and their own tongue. He could read smoke signals; he had made friends among the renegades who sometimes took a long chance and drifted down to the government posts in company with peaceful Indians. Gradually he got such information as he could, and as he got it he stored it away in his mind until he felt he was as well equipped with knowledge as he could hope.

Then he set forth one day to pay a visit to Cochise in person. It was a risky proposition but the old-timers never balked at taking long chances; else they would never have gone west of the Rio Grande. Jeffords induced an Apache who had been with Cochise to accompany him part-way on the journey; and before the Indian backtracked for the military post, he had him send up a smoke signal announcing the visit and stating that its nature was peaceable.

When the last shreds of smoke vanished in the clear sky the native departed and Jeffords resumed his journey toward the

Dragoons. No answering sign had come from those scarred granite peaks; and as he rode on toward them across the blazing plain they stood forth against the cloudless sky, frowning, inscrutable. For all that the eye could see they might have been deserted, without life among them since the beginning of time; or they might be at this moment sheltering hundreds of biding enemies. He had to wait until he got among those rocks before he knew what they held in store for him. And he rode on to find that answer.

He rode to the edge of the plain and from the lowlands up the first slopes of talus at the mouth of a long, steep-walled cañon. He pressed his horse on up the narrow gorge. On either side the cliffs loomed above him; in places they were so close together that he could have tossed a pebble from one to the other. There was no sign of life; no sound, no movement.

But this tall, lean rider knew that somewhere among those granite pinnacles which stood out against the sky-line before him and on either side, scores of venomous black eyes were watching him. He knew that to every pair of eyes there was a rifle; and that many a crooked brown finger was fairly itching to press the trigger.

Thus he rode his sweating pony up and up where the gorge wound toward the summit, up and up until he reached the nests of enormous granite boulders which hang seemingly poised between the heavens and the flat plain beneath. And finally he saw before him the lodges made of bended bushes with skins and blankets spread over their curved sides. He reined in his horse, dismounted and walked into the camp of the renegades.

Cochise was sitting in his lodge, which was but a bare shelter from the sun's rays—a number of bushes bound together at their tops formed the ribs for a haphazard sort of tent made of outspread skins—and whether he was awaiting this visit no man knows. For the war-chief showed no sign of surprize or of welcome when Captain Jeffords entered the place. But when the tall white man had seated himself upon the skins which covered the dry earth and announced his purpose, Cochise betrayed astonishment.

"I have come here," Jeffords said with the deliberation which one must use when he is talking with an Indian, "to see you, to know you better, and to talk over certain matters with you. I will stay here two days or maybe three; and while I remain—to show my good faith—one of your squaws may keep my weapons." With which he laid aside his rifle and revolver.

After a silence whose length would have been disconcerting to any other than an old-timer owning a knowledge of the Indian ways, Cochise called a squaw, who picked up the firearms at his bidding and took them away with her. Then these two men of parts settled down to talking business.

IT TOOK them two days and two nights, for Jeffords was careful not to crowd matters in the slightest, hanging to the savage custom of long silences and few words at a time between them. As the hours went on he sat there patiently listening to the war-chief recounting at great length his experiences with the white men, reciting the stories of bad faith and broken compacts; and when these recitals were finished he continued to sit in silence for long intervals before he resumed his own arguments.

Thus the talk went on in the little brush shelter during the hot days and the cool evenings; and what it all came to was this:

Jeffords said that this war between Cochise and the soldiers was not his war. It was, he maintained, none of his business excepting when the officers, who carried the authority of the great father in Washington, bade him to do their bidding and act as a guide or scout. Otherwise, why should he take up his good time and risk his life in fighting a people against whom he held no personal grudge?

And why should that people bother their heads and risk their lives in fighting him? He followed that question by reminding Cochise of the reprisals which he had launched against the Chiracahua Apaches. They had killed fourteen of his men and stolen much of his property; but he and his men had killed several times fourteen of Cochise's warriors and had wrought devastation in proportion. Did that pay the Apaches?

Well, then, why keep on with it? He knew good things of Cochise and had respect for him. Cochise knew who he was and the sort of man he was. No need for them to go on injuring each other and

each other's people. They could call it a draw and quit right now.

If the white soldiers demanded Jeffords' services, all well and good; he would go and serve them as scout or interpreter or guide, and do what fighting one must do when he is on the war-path. And on such occasions, if the warriors of Cochise could kill him or capture him, all right; it was their privilege. But no more of this attacking each other out of season. If Cochise would let his men and property alone, he would no longer make any raids on Cochise's people.

That was the gist of it and it took a long time to say it. A long time during which Cochise told Jeffords many things and Jeffords spoke with Cochise of many subjects outside the direct line of discussion. For that was the Indian manner; they must feel each other out and satisfy themselves each as to the other's personality. In the end they shook hands on their bargain, and Captain Thomas Jonathan Jeffords got back his weapons from the squaw, saddled his pony and rode forth from the camp of the Apache war-chief, the party of the first part to a compact such as never had been heard of up to that time in the history of Indian warfare.

That compact stood. And there were times when its observance was a delicate matter; times when Captain Jeffords had to draw fine lines between his duty as a government scout and his obligations to Cochise. But he managed to perform those duties and to keep the faith; and although he went forth with the cavalry troopers on many an occasion, serving them faithfully and well, he never fell out with the war-chief of the Chiracahuas.

In fact their friendship grew as the years went by and they came to regard each other as brothers. During such visits as he paid to the Stronghold in lulls of the border warfare, Jeffords got to know much of Cochise's history, of his grievances, and of his view-point.

During these same years there came a change in the command, and General George Crook, who is looked upon by the old-timers as the greatest of our Indian-fighters, led the cavalry against the Apaches. Crook's understanding of the Indian was perfect; and not only was he able to beat the natives at their own game of ambuscade, but he thoroughly sympathized with their cause. He knew how Washington and incompetent officers had blundered and lied to them.

It was therefore with the utmost willingness that he combined his campaign of savage-fighting with another and quieter campaign of diplomacy which was being waged by General O. O. Howard.

The latter had been sent out by President Grant to get the Chiracahua Apaches back on the reservation.

And one day, at a time when Crook had Cochise and his followers pretty badly pressed, a day when Cochise must have realized that the savage cause was a lost one and that the god of battles was no longer with his people, Howard made up his mind to open negotiations with the war-chief in person.

He asked his scouts for a man who could find where Cochise was hiding at the time and conduct him to the place, and they told him that there was only one man in the territory of Arizona who stood a chance of doing this—Captain Jeffords.

General Howard sent for Jeffords and the two conferred in the presence of a number of cavalry officers. And when the general had announced his purpose a dispute arose; the officers advised him to take along a strong escort of troops if he intended making this call. Jeffords gave it out flat that such an escort would need all the cavalry along the border. No troops or else an army, was his way of putting it; and if there were an army he did not purpose accompanying the expedition. On the other hand he would willingly take General Howard alone. They compromised by sending along a single aide, a captain.

THEN these three men journeyed to the northern end of the Dragoon Mountains; and as they crossed the wide plains toward the somber range, they halted two or three times while Captain Jeffords built a little fire. The general and his aide watched the old-timer standing by the wisp of flame, sprinkling upon it now one sort of fuel and now another, now smothering the rising fumes with his saddle blanket. And as they rode onward they saw the smoke of Apache signal fires rising from the ragged summits ahead of them. They saw these things and it is a fact that they thought but little of them.

So they marveled when Captain Jeffords

chose his route into the mountains without hesitation; and their wonder grew when he pointed to a group of enormous boulders which topped the ridge ahead of them, saying—

"We will find Cochise's people camped there today."

They rode on upward and came into the camp of the Apaches. Here and there a ragged squaw peered out of a dirty lodge at them; they saw a group of children scattering like frightened quail. There were no warriors, only one or two old men.

"Where is Cochise?" General Howard asked.

"He will be here within the hour," Jeffords answered, "and when he comes you will know him because you will see, riding ahead of him, the ugliest looking Apache in Arizona, carrying a lance."

And because Jeffords had exchanged no word as yet with the Indians, the two white men marveled again. The old-timer led them to the chief's lodge, where they sat down and waited.

Within the hour a group of Apaches came riding up the nearest gorge, and at their head General Howard saw one whose sinister face conformed to the description which Jeffords had given him; the warrior was carrying a lance. And behind him rode the war-chief. Cochise dismounted and entered his lodge. After the Mexican fashion he kissed Jeffords on both cheeks, embracing him warmly. Then—

"What is it these men want?" he asked.

Jeffords introduced General Howard and the aide, and stated the former's motive in making this visit. Cochise sat silent for some moments. At length, pointing to General Howard—

"Will he keep his word if we exchange promises?" he demanded.

"I have advised him not to promise too much, as is the habit of many white men," Jeffords answered, "and I believe he is honest."

The old war-chief fell silent again. Finally he turned to General Howard.

"Some of my young men," he said slowly, "are away now. They are making their living. They may come back at any time. And when they come back there may be trouble. It would be better if you were not here then."

And although he was not long from the East General Howard knew enough about the Apaches and their habits to be sure in what manner those young men were making their living; what sort of trouble would probably follow their arrival in the camp. It would be an awkward situation if he were to be in this place during a battle between the savages and his fellow soldiers. But he was not a young man and the prospects of a long ride back to the nearest military post were not alluring. He said as much.

"Four of my young men will take you to a good place," Cochise told him, "and after the third day they will bring you back."

On the advice of Jeffords this course of action was agreed to; and four Apaches took General Howard down into the valley as far as the point where the Sulphur Springs ranch-buildings now stand.

Jeffords and the aide bided here on the heights with the Indians. And on the second day, true to Cochise's prophecy, a band of the renegades came riding hard up the gorge. The spot where the Indians were encamped was a saddle at the summit, some hundreds of feet lower than the adjoining ridges. Now as the fugitive warriors threw themselves from their lathered ponies, announcing that two troops of cavalry were close behind them, the aide of General Howard witnessed one of those spectacles which are easier to tell than to believe.

With the announcement of this emergency, the camp moved. In the same time that it takes to say the foregoing sentence, it moved—men, women, children and every bit of impedimenta. It was like one of those magic transformations of which we used to read in fairy-tales when we were children.

One moment the Apaches were squatting among their lodges; and in the next moment people and goods were gone; the place was bare.

Every warrior and squaw and child seized what objects were nearest at hand, overlooking none, and scampered off with them. Within a few minutes of the arrival of the fugitives, the entire band was scattered among the boulders and pinnacles on the higher portion of the ridge; Cochise was disposing his warriors to the best advantage to repel the attack.

But the cavalry made no advance beyond the cañon mouth and there was no fight. When General Howard returned at the end of the next day he saw the manner in which the war-chief had deployed his men and was

struck with admiration. No general, he said in telling of the incident afterward, no matter how highly schooled in the arts of modern warfare, could have disposed of his forces to better advantage than this savage had done.

Then General Howard, his aide and Captain Jeffords were given one of those primitive lodges and settled down here among the lofty heights of Cochise's Stronghold, isolated from all white men, surrounded by the most bloodthirsty savages in America, rubbing elbows with naked warriors who had spent the years of their manhood perfecting themselves in the fine arts of ambush and murder.

Cochise saw to it that they were well supplied with robes and blankets; by his orders they were feasted as became ambassadors; and General Howard ate with a relish one evening a stew which he afterward learned was made from the meat of a fat half-grown colt.

The conference went on at a leisurely rate; but at that it was conducted much more swiftly than most discussions in which Indians have taken part, for since the party had come to these heights they had sent back no word of how they were faring, and they dared not drag out the affair to too great a length lest an expedition come after them. Such a development would effectually stop the negotiations and, in all probability, forever prevent their renewal.

General Howard told Cochise his purpose in coming to Arizona, and dwelt with emphasis on the fact that President Grant had sent him. The name of this famous warrior of the white men had weight with the leader of the Chiracahuas. If the man who led the armies of the great father to victory was behind this movement, he must at least respect the overtures. Howard went on to say that all the President wanted was peace with the Indians—to get them back on the reservation and to treat them fairly.

Cochise replied with a long statement of his own grievances, beginning with the incident wherein Lieutenant Bascom was a main figure; he told of other incidents wherein the white man had not shown up well. Many promises had been made to the Apaches but none had been kept. Still he was willing to go on with this affair; President Grant was a mighty warrior, and Captain Jeffords had vouched for his envoy's honesty.

THUS they sat within the rude shelter of boughs and skins, smoking and talking interminably while the naked braves passed outside, eying them through the doorway with sharp sidelong glances, and lean withered squaws cackled all day long among the vermin-ridden lodges about them.

Then Cochise announced that he and his people would go back to live upon a reservation and to eat the white man's rations—on certain conditions. The reservation must be in their own country; he named a portion of the Sulphur Springs Valley and the adjoining Chiracahuas. And the agent must be Captain Jeffords.

There was justice in these conditions. The tribe had always roved over the country which Cochise named. As for the agent, it was a notorious fact that about nine-tenths of the Indian troubles originated through dishonesty of the agents; either they were thieves or their friends were, which amounted to the same thing. And Jeffords was honest.

When General Howard had heard out the war-chief, he at once accepted the stipulations. President Grant had given him *carte blanche* in this matter; he was sure that he could keep his promises. But Captain Jeffords interposed an obstacle.

The last thing that he wanted was to be an Indian agent. The Government owed him some twenty thousand dollars and if he took the office it would prevent his collecting the claims which were then under adjudication in Washington. Besides he well knew the political forces which were always working on an Indian agent, the strings which were being pulled in Washington, the various grafts, big and petty, to which one must shut his eyes if he wanted to remain in charge of a reservation. He stated his position.

Cochise remained firm. No agent other than Jeffords. That was his ultimatum. He would rather go on fighting until his people were extinct than to take them back and have them robbed. General Howard turned in appeal to the old-timer. And Captain Jeffords then capitulated—under conditions.

He would give up the hope of collecting that money which the Government owed him and he would take charge of the new reservation. But if he did these things he must be in complete control. His word

must be law and there must be no outside interference. If he gave the order, no white man—not even the commander of the United States Army—could come within the boundaries of the district set apart for the Indians. Beyond his judgment there could be no appeal. He did not propose to have matters taken to Washington over his head.

And, to make a long story short, General Howard not only consented to all of this, but he saw to it that President Grant confirmed his promises. He made a special trip to Washington and placed the matter before the nation's Chief Executive, who issued the necessary orders. And so late in 1872 Cochise and his people came back to the reservation.

THAT is not all either. They lived there, during the lifetime of Cochise, in peace and quiet. There were thefts and there were cases of whisky-pedling with their inevitable accompaniments in the way of murder. There were times when the young men got restless; when passing Apaches from the White Mountains tried to induce the tribe to rise and leave the reservation with them; when medicine-men from these other clans preached bloody war.

But Cochise and Captain Thomas Jonathan Jeffords attended to all of these things as they came up. They ferreted out the criminals; they hunted down the whisky-pedlers; they drove the recalcitrant spirits from other tribes away and quelled the dissatisfaction which they had stirred up.

And, because there was no appeal beyond their judgment; because no hungry politician could bring it about that his friends got the chance to swindle the Apaches or to rob them of their rations—as was being done with other Indians all over the West at the time—these two old men were able to enforce their edicts and to keep at peace the most warlike savages in the whole Southwest.

They kept the faith with the Government, those two; and they kept the faith with each other; and the friendship which had begun that day when Jeffords rode up into Cochise's Stronghold grew closer and closer.

That friendship never wavered until the day of Cochise's death. And when he knew that the end was coming he called for Jeffords, who was brought to his bedside. It was about two hours before noon.

"Tomorrow at this time in the morning," Cochise said, "I will die. I want to say good-by to you."

They talked for some time over things that had happened in days gone by. And finally Cochise asked the old-timer whether he believed in an hereafter. Jeffords, like many another man, could only hope that there might be such a thing.

"Well," Cochise told him finally, "I believe that after I am gone I will see you again, my friend."

And those were the last words together. The next morning, at the hour which he had named, Cochise breathed his last.

THE LURE

by Glenn Ward Dresbach

I HAVE seen sails like white moths near the moon
Arising on a tropic sea, and then
Turned down a jungle path past some lagoon
Whose magic could not hold my peace again
Because of sails I saw and dreams I dreamed
Of places still beyond the place I found—
Luring the sails that in the moonlight gleamed
Some fairer land by those still seas was bound!

And when, at sea again, I have looked back
On friendly palms swayed on a beauteous shore
Wreathed with the spray that marks the breakers' track,
I have desired to wander there once more—
But still the lure of places that would be
More lovely danced before our ship at sea.

THE PRIZE

A TALE OF THE BRETHREN OF THE MAIN

by Rafael Sabatini

Author of "Rebels Convict," "Don Diego Valdez," etc.

THE fame of Captain Peter Blood had run like ripples before the breeze across the face of the Caribbean from the Bahamas to the Windward Isles, from New Providence to Trinidad. An echo of it had reached Europe, and at the Court of St. James's representations were made by the ambassador of Spain, to whom it was answered that it must not be supposed that Captain Blood held any commission from the King of England; that he was in fact a proscribed rebel, and that any measures against him by King Philip V would receive the cordial approbation of King James II. It was a *brutum fulmen* that inspired no terrors.

In old Tortuga, that nest of piracy, the captain took his ease, what time his eight-score reckless followers gamed and drank and squandered in excesses the gold they had brought back from their last raid upon the sea-going subjects of the King of Spain. And meanwhile adventurers of every degree—from men who knew no trade but that of piracy to rude boucan-hunters athirst for easy plunder—flocked to offer him their swords.

One day as he sat with Hagthorpe and Wolverstone over a pipe and a bottle of rum in the stifling reek of tar and stale tobacco of a waterside tavern, he was accosted by a splendid ruffian in a gold-laced coat of dark-blue taffetas, with a crimson sash that was a foot wide about the waist.

"*C'est vous qu'on appelle Le Sang?*" (Are you the man they call Blood?) the fellow hailed him.

The captain knew enough French to understand the question. He looked up to consider the questioner before replying. The man was tall and built on lines of agile strength, with a swarthy aquiline face that was brutally handsome. A diamond of great price flamed on the indifferently clean hand resting on the pommel of his long rapier, and there were gold rings in his ears, half-concealed by the long ringlets of his oily chestnut hair.

Captain Blood took the pipe-stem from between his lips.

"My name," he said, "is Peter Blood. The Spaniards know me for Don Pedro Sangre, and a Frenchman may call me Le Sang if he pleases."

"Good," said the gaudy adventurer in English, and without further invitation he drew up a stool and sat down at that greasy table.

"My name," he informed the three men, two of whom at least were eying him askance, "it is Levasseur. You may have heard of me."

They had, of course. Captain of a twenty-gun ship, with a crew mainly composed of French boucan-hunters from Northern Hispaniola, his reputation as a

buccaneer stood high among the wild Brethren of the Main. A monstrously vain, roaring, quarrelsome, hard-drinking, hard-gaming scoundrel, he enjoyed also a reputation of another sort. There was about his gaudy, swaggering raffishness something that the women found singularly alluring.

It was current gossip that even Mademoiselle de La Place, the daughter of the governor of Tortuga, had been caught in the snare of his wild attractiveness, and that Levasseur had gone the length of audacity by asking her hand in marriage of her father. M. de La Place had made him the only possible answer. He had shown him the door. Levasseur had departed in a rage, swearing that he would make *mademoiselle* his wife in the teeth of all the fathers in Christendom and that M. de La Place should bitterly rue the affront he had put upon him.

This was the man that now thrust himself upon Captain Blood with a proposal of association, offering not only his sword, but his ship and the men who sailed in her.

A dozen years ago, as a lad of barely twenty, Levasseur had sailed with that monster of cruelty, L'Ollonais, and his own subsequent exploits bore witness and did credit to the school in which he had been reared. It is doubtful if in his day there was a greater scoundrel among the Brethren of the Main; and yet, repulsive though he found him, Captain Blood could not deny that the fellow's proposals displayed boldness, imagination and resource; and he was forced to admit that jointly they could undertake operations of a greater magnitude than was possible singly to either of them.

The climax of Levasseur's project was to be a raid upon the wealthy mainland city of Maracaybo; but for this, he admitted, six hundred men at the very least would be needed, and six hundred men were not to be conveyed in the two bottoms they now commanded. Preliminary cruises must take place, having for one of its objects the capture of further ships.

Being pressed by both Hagthorpe and Wolverstone, who did not share his own personal dislike of the Frenchman, the end of the matter was that within a week articles were drawn up between Levasseur and Captain Blood, and signed by them and by the chosen representatives of their followers.

IT WAS provided as usual that should the two vessels separate, a strict account must afterward be rendered of all prizes severally taken, whilst the vessel taking a prize should retain three-fifths of its value, surrendering two-fifths to its associate. These shares were subsequently to be subdivided among the crew of each vessel in accordance with the articles already obtaining between each captain and his own men. For the rest, the articles contained all the clauses that were usual, among which was the provision that any man found guilty of abstracting and concealing any part of a prize, be it of no more value than a peso, should be summarily hanged from the yard-arm.

All being now settled, they made ready for sea, and on the very eve of sailing Levasseur narrowly escaped being shot in a romantic attempt to scale the wall of the governor's garden, with the object of taking passionate leave of the infatuated Mademoiselle de La Place. He desisted after having been twice fired upon from among the fragrant pimento trees where the governor's guards were posted.

That night he slept on board his ship—which with characteristic flamboyance he had named *La Foudre*—and there on the following morning he received a visit from Captain Blood, whom he greeted as his admiral. The Irishman came to settle certain final details, of which the most important was an understanding that in the event of the two vessels becoming separated by accident or design they should rejoin each other exactly a month later at Tortuga.

Thereafter Levasseur entertained his admiral at dinner, and jointly they drank success to the expedition, most copiously on the part of Levasseur. Finally Captain Blood went over the side and was rowed back to his great red ship, the *Colleen*—formerly the Spanish frigate *Cinco Llagas*.

No sooner had he departed than a canoe brought up alongside *La Foudre*, and a half-caste Indian stepped out of her and went up the ladder with a folded scrap of paper for Captain Levasseur.

The captain unfolded the letter, sadly soiled and crumpled by contact with the half-caste's person.

Roughly translated, this is what the note contained:

MY WELL-BELOVED:

I am in the Dutch brig *Jongvrouw*, which is about to sail. Resolved to separate us forever my cruel father is sending me to Europe, in my brother's charge. I implore you, come to my rescue! Deliver me, my well-beloved hero!

Your desolated
MADELEINE, who loves you.

The well-beloved hero was moved to the soul of him by that passionate appeal. His scowling glance swept the bay for the Dutch brig that had been riding there. She was nowhere to be seen. He roared out the question in his mind. In answer the half-caste pointed to a sail standing out to sea a mile or so away.

"There she go," he said.

"There!" The Frenchman gasped and stared, his face empurpling. "And where have you been that you come here only now with this? Answer me!"

The half-caste cowered terrified before his fury. His explanation, if he had one, was paralyzed by fear. Levasseur caught him by the throat, shook him twice, snarling the while, then hurled him into the scuppers. His head struck the gunwale, and he lay there, quite still, a trickle of blood issuing from his mouth.

Levasseur dashed one hand against the other as if dusting them.

"Heave that filth overboard," he ordered those who stood behind him in the waist. "Then up anchor, and let us after her."

"Steady, captain. What's this?"

There was a restraining hand upon his arm, and the broad face of his lieutenant, Cahusac, a burly, fearless, Breton scoundrel, was stolidly regarding him.

Levasseur made clear his purpose with a deal of unnecessary obscenity.

Cahusac shook his head.

"A Dutch brig!" said he. "Impossible! We should never be allowed."

"And who will deny us?"

Levasseur was between amazement and anger.

"For one thing, there's your own crew will be none too willing. For another there's Captain Blood."

"I care nothing for Captain Blood."

"But it is necessary that you should. He has the power, the weight of metal and of men."

"Ah!" said Levasseur, showing his teeth.

But his eyes, riveted upon that distant sail, were gloomily thoughtful.

Cursing in his soul, even before the anchor was weighed, the association into which he had entered, he was already studying ways of evasion. What Cahusac implied was true. Blood would never suffer violence to be done in his presence to a Dutchman; but it might be done in his absence; and, being done, he must perforce condone it.

Within the hour the *Colleen* and *La Foudre* were beating out to sea together. All day the Dutch brig was in sight, though by evening she had dwindled to the merest speck on the northern horizon.

Their own course lay eastward along the northern coast of Hispaniola. To that course the *Colleen* held steadily through the night, with the result that when day broke again she was alone. *La Foudre*, under cover of the darkness, had struck away to the northeast with every rag of canvas on her yards.

Cahusac had attempted yet again to protest, but feebly.

"The —— take you!" Levasseur had answered him. "A ship's a ship, whether she be Dutch or Spanish, and ships are our present need. That will suffice for the men."

Dawn found *La Foudre* close on the Dutchman's heels, not a mile astern, and the sight of her very evidently flustered the *Jongvrouw*. No doubt *mademoiselle's* brother, recognizing Levasseur's ship, would be responsible for this. They saw her crowding canvas in a futile endeavor to outsail them, whereupon they stood off to starboard and raced on until they were in such a position as to send a warning shot across her bow.

The *Jongvrouw* veered, showed them her rudder and opened fire with her stern-chasers. The small shot went whistling through *La Foudre's* rigging with some slight damage to her canvas. Followed a brief running fight, in the course of which the Dutchman let fly a broadside.

Five minutes after that they were board and board. The *Jongvrouw* was held tight in the clutches of the *La Foudre's* grapnels with the buccaneers storming noisily into her waist.

THE Dutchman's master, purple in the face, stood forward to beard the pirate, and at his heels came an elegant, pale-faced young gentleman in whom Levasseur recognized his brother-in-law elect.

"Captain Levasseur, this is an outrage for which you shall be made to answer. What do you seek on board my ship?"

"At first I sought only something that belongs to me. But since you chose war and opened fire with some damage to my ship and loss of life to five of my men, why war it is, and your ship a prize of war."

From the quarter rail Mademoiselle de La Place looked down with glowing eyes in breathless wonder upon her well-beloved hero, towering there, masterful, audacious, beautiful. He saw her, and with a glad shout sprang toward her.

The Dutch master got in his way to arrest his progress. In his natural impatience to reach his mistress, Levasseur did not stay to argue. He swung the pole-ax that he carried, and the Dutchman went down in blood with a cloven skull. The eager lover stepped carelessly across the body and came on, his countenance joyously alight.

But *mademoiselle* was shrinking now. She was a girl upon the threshold of glorious womanhood, of a fine height and nobly molded, with heavy coils of glossy black hair above and about a face that was the color of old ivory. Her countenance was cast in lines of arrogance, stressed by the low lids of her full, dark eyes.

In a bound her well-beloved hero was beside her. Flinging away his bloody pole-ax, he opened wide his arms to enfold her. But she still shrank even within his embrace which would not be denied; a look of dread had come to temper the normal arrogance of her almost perfect face.

"Mine, mine at last, and in spite of all!" he cried exultantly, truly heroic.

But she, endeavoring to thrust him back, her hands against his breast, could only falter—

"Why, why did you kill him?"

He laughed, and answered her heroically with the tolerance of a god for the mortal to whom he condescends:

"He stood betwixt us. Let his death be a symbol. Let all who would stand between us mark it and beware."

It was so splendidly terrific, the gesture of it was so broad and fine and his magnetism so compelling, that she cast aside her silly tremors and yielded herself freely, intoxicated, to his fond embrace. Thereafter he swung her to his shoulder, and, stepping with ease beneath that burden, bore her in a sort of triumph, lustily cheered by his men, to the deck of his own ship. Her inconsiderate brother might have ruined that romantic progress but for the watchful Cahusac, who quietly tripped him up and then trussed him like a fowl.

Thereafter what time the captain languished in his lady's smile within the roundhouse Cahusac was dealing with the spoils of war. The Dutch crew was ordered into the long-boat and bidden go to the devil. Fortunately, as they numbered fewer than thirty, the long-boat, though perilously overcrowded, could yet contain them. Then Cahusac, having inspected the cargo, put a quartermaster and a score of men aboard the *Jongvrouw* and left her to follow *La Foudre*, which he now headed south for the Leeward Islands.

Cahusac was disposed to be ill-humored. The risk they had run in taking the Dutch brig and doing violence to members of the family of the governor of Tortuga was out of all proportion to the value of their prize. He said so sullenly to Levasseur.

"You'll keep that opinion to yourself," the captain answered him. "Don't think I am the man to thrust my neck into a noose. I am going to send an offer of terms to the governor of Tortuga that he will be forced to accept.

"Set a course for the Virgen Magra. We'll go ashore and settle things from there. And tell them to fetch that milksop La Place to the roundhouse."

Levasseur went back to the adoring lady.

THITHER too the lady's brother was presently conducted. The captain rose to receive him, bending his stalwart height to avoid striking the cabin roof with his head. *Mademoiselle* rose too.

"Why this?" she asked Levasseur, pointing to her brother's pinioned wrists—the remains of Cahusac's precautions.

"I deplore it," said he. "I desire it to end. Let M. de La Place give me his parole——"

"I give you nothing," flashed the white-faced youth, who did not lack for spirit.

"You see."

Levasseur shrugged his deep regret, and *mademoiselle* swung, protesting, to her brother.

"Henri, this is foolish. You are not behaving as my friend. You ——"

"Little fool," he broke in—and the "little" was out of place; she was the taller of the twain—"little fool, do you think I should be acting as your friend to make terms with this blackguard pirate?"

"Steady, my young cockerel," Levasseur laughed; but his laugh was not nice.

Nevertheless M. de La Place continued, undeterred:

"Don't you perceive your wicked folly in the harm it has brought already? Lives have been lost—men have died—that this monster might overtake you. And don't you yet realize where you stand—in the power of this beast, of this cur, born in a kennel, and bred in thieving and murder?"

He might have said more, but at that moment Levasseur struck him across the mouth. For Levasseur cared as little as another to hear the truth about himself.

Mademoiselle supressed a scream as the youth staggered back under the blow. He came to rest against a bulkhead, and leaned there with bleeding mouth. But his spirit was unquenched, and there was a ghastly smile on his white face as his eyes sought his sister's.

"You see," said he simply. "He strikes a man whose hands are bound."

The simple words, and more than that their tone of ineffable disdain, aroused the passion that never slumbered deeply in Levasseur.

"And what should you do if your hands were unbound, you pitiful puppy?"

He seized his prisoner by the breast of his doublet and shook him.

"Answer me! What should you do? Tchah! You empty windbag. You——"

And then came a torrent of words unknown to *mademoiselle*, yet of whose foulness her intuitions made her conscious.

With blenched cheeks she stood by the cabin table and cried out to Levasseur to stop. To obey her he opened the door and flung her brother through it and down the companion.

"Put that under hatches until I call for it again," he roared, and shut the door.

Thus *mademoiselle* beheld her well-beloved hero's nature in curl-papers, as it were, and she found the spectacle terrifying. It recalled the brutal slaughter of the Dutch captain, and suddenly she realized that what her brother had just said was no more than true.

"Why, sweetheart, what is this?" cried Levasseur, regarding her.

He moved toward her. She recoiled as he advanced. There was a smile on his face, a glitter in his eyes, that awoke a panic in her, fetched her heart into her throat.

He caught her as she reached the uttermost limits of the cabin, seized her in his long arms and pulled her to him.

"No, no!" she panted.

"Yes, yes," he mocked her; and his mockery was the most terrible thing of all.

He crushed her to him brutally, deliberately hurtful because she resisted, and kissed her while she writhed in his embrace. Then, his passion mounting, he grew angry and further revealed himself, stripped off the last rag of hero's mask that still may have hung upon his face.

"Little fool, did you not hear your brother say that you are in my power? Remember it, and remember that of your own free will you came. I am not the man with whom a woman may play fast and loose. So you'd best accept what you have invited."

He kissed her again, almost contemptuously, and flung her off.

"No more scowls," he said. "You'll have smiles for me, or you'll be sorry else."

Some one knocked. Levasseur strode off to open. Cahusac appeared with a long face.

"I've something to show you, captain," said he grimly. "Will you step out here?"

Cahusac pointed away to starboard. Levasseur looked, and muttered an oath. Two ships that at the distance seemed of considerable burden were heading toward them some five miles away.

Ahead of them a low cloud showed on the horizon which Cahusac pronounced the northernmost of the Virgin Islands.

"If they follow us what's to happen?" demanded Cahusac.

"We'll fight," growled Levasseur.

"Counsels of despair," said Cahusac, and he spat upon the deck.

"This comes of going to sea with a love-sick madman. Now keep your temper, captain, for the crew will be at the end of theirs if we have trouble as a result of this Dutchman business."

FOR the remainder of that day Levasseur's thoughts were of anything but love. He remained on deck, his eyes now upon the land, now upon those two slowly gaining ships. To run for the open could avail him nothing. He must stand at bay and fight.

And then toward evening when within three miles of shore and when he was about to give the order to strip for battle he almost fainted from relief when a voice from the crow's-nest above announced that the larger of the two ships was the *Colleen*. Her companion was presumably a prize.

But the pessimism of Cahusac abated nothing. "What will Blood say about this Dutchman?"

"Let him say what he pleases."

Levasseur laughed in the immensity of his relief.

"And what about the children of the governor of Tortuga?"

"He must not know."

"He'll come to know in the end."

"Aye; but by then, *morbleu*, the matter will be settled. I shall have made my peace with the governor. I tell you I know the way to compel him to come to terms."

Presently the four vessels lay to off the northern coast of La Virgen Magra, a narrow little island, arid and treeless, uninhabited save by birds and turtles and unproductive of anything but salt, of which there were many ponds to the south.

Levasseur put off in a boat, accompanied by Cahusac and two other officers, and went to visit Captain Blood aboard the *Colleen*.

"Our brief separation has been mighty profitable," was the Irishman's greeting. "It's a busy morning we've both had."

He was in high good humor as he led the way to the great cabin for a rendering of accounts.

The tall ship that accompanied the *Colleen* was a Spanish vessel of sixteen guns, the *Santiago* from Puerto Rico, with a hundred and twenty thousand weight of cacao, forty thousand pieces of eight and the value of ten thousand more in jewels. A rich capture of which two-fifths, under the articles, went to Levasseur and his crew.

Of the money and jewels a division was made on the spot. The cacao, it was agreed, should be taken to Tortuga to be sold.

Then it was the turn of Levasseur, and black grew the brow of Captain Blood as the Frenchman's tale was unfolded. At the end he roundly expressed his disapproval. The Dutch were a friendly people whom it was a folly to alienate, particularly for so paltry a matter as these hides and tobacco, which at most would fetch a bare twenty thousand pieces.

But Levasseur answered him as he had answered Cahusac, that a ship was a ship, and that it was ships they needed against their projected enterprise. Perhaps because things had gone well with him that day, Blood ended by shrugging the matter aside.

Thereupon Levasseur proposed that the *Colleen* and her prize should return to Tortuga to unload the cacao and enlist the further adventurers that could now be accommodated. Levasseur meanwhile would effect certain necessary repairs, and then, proceeding south, await his admiral at Saltatudos, an island conveniently situated in the latitude of 11° 11′ N. for their enterprise against Maracaybo. To Levasseur's relief Captain Blood not only agreed, but pronounced himself ready to set sail at once.

No sooner had the *Colleen* departed than Levasseur brought his ships into the lagoon and set about the erection of temporary quarters ashore for himself, his men and his enforced guests during the careening of *La Foudre*.

At sunset that evening the wind freshened; it grew thence to a gale, and from that to such a hurricane that Levasseur was thankful to find himself ashore and his ships safe within the ample shelter of the lagoon.

In the glory of the following morning, fresh and clean after the storm, with an invigorating briny tang in the air from the salt-ponds on the south of the islands, Levasseur set about the matter of making himself safe with the governor of Tortuga.

With his back to a ridge of bleached dunes, beside the spread of sail from which he had improvised a tent, sat Levasseur, enthroned upon an empty cask. A guard of honor of a half-dozen of his officers hung about him.

Before him, guarded by two negroes in cotton drawers, stood young La Place, in frilled shirt and satin breeches. His comely face was haggard, his hands were tied behind him in a thong of leather. Near at

hand, on his right and also under guard but unpinioned, *mademoiselle* sat hunched upon a hillock of sand.

Levasseur was addressing M. de La Place, speaking to him in French.

"So that there may be no misunderstanding, let me recapitulate," he was saying to young La Place with mock suavity. "Your ransom is fixed at twenty thousand pieces of eight, and you shall have liberty upon your parole to go to Tortuga to collect it. I will provide the means to convey you thither. Your father should not consider that an excessive sum to pay for the life and liberty of his only son and for the dowry of his only daughter. Indeed, if anything I am too modest, *pardi*."

M. de La Place raised his head, and looked the captain straight between the eyes.

"I refuse—utterly and absolutely. So do your worst, and be —— for a filthy pirate."

Levasseur laughed carelessly. He had himself well in hand this morning.

"You will not persist in your refusal," said he. "But I must warn you that should you give me your parole under stress and afterward play me false I shall know how to find and punish you; also, should you forget to return with the dowry you'll not consider it unreasonable that I may forget to marry your sister. You'll bear in mind that meanwhile her honor remains in pawn to me."

M. de La Place cast a wild glance at *mademoiselle*, and observed the gray despair that had almost stamped the beauty from her face. Disgust and fury swept across his countenance.

Then he roused himself, and answered resolutely:

"No, you dog! A thousand times, no!"

Levasseur's fingers had been busy tying knots in a length of whipcord. He held it up a moment.

"You know this? It is a rosary of pain that has wrought the conversion of many a stubborn heretic. It is capable of screwing the eyes out of a man's head by way of helping him to see reason. As you please."

He flung the length of knotted cord to one of the negroes, who in an instant made it fast about the prisoner's brows. Then between cord and cranium the black inserted a short length of metal, round and slender as a pipe-stem. That done, he rolled his eyes toward Levasseur, awaiting the captain's signal.

Levasseur considered his victim, and beheld him tense and braced, his haggard face of a leaden hue, beads of perspiration glinting on his pallid brow just beneath the cord.

Mademoiselle cried out and would have risen; but her guards restrained her, and she sank down again moaning.

"I beg that you will spare yourself and your sister," said the captain, "by being reasonable. What after all is the sum I have named? To your wealthy father a bagatelle. I repeat, I have been too modest. But since I have said twenty thousand pieces of eight, twenty thousand pieces of eight it shall be."

"AND for what, if you please, have you asked twenty thousand pieces of eight?"

In execrable French, but in a voice that was crisp and pleasant, seeming to echo some of the mockery that had invested Levasseur's, that question floated over their heads.

Startled, they looked up and round; and on the crest of the dunes behind them in sharp silhouette against the deep cobalt of the sky they beheld the tall, lean figure and tawny face of Captain Blood. He was scrupulously dressed in black with silver lace, a crimson ostrich plume curled about the broad brim of his hat affording the only touch of color.

Launching himself upon the yielding sand, into which he sank to the level of the calves of his fine boots of Spanish leather, Captain Blood came sliding erect to the beach. He was followed by Wolverstone, the one-eyed giant, and a dozen others. He doffed his hat with a flourish to the lady.

"Good morning, captain, " said he, in English now; and he explained his presence. "'Twas last night's hurricane. We had no choice but to ride it with stripped poles, and it drove us back the way we had gone. Moreover—bad 'cess to it!—the *Santiago* sprang her mainmast; so we've put into the cove on the west of the island. But who are these?"

And he designated the man and the woman.

"*Voilà!*" said Cahusac pregnantly.

Levasseur, white with rage and chagrin, controlled himself to answer.

"As you see, two prisoners."

"Ah! Washed ashore in last night's gale, I presume?"

"Not so."

Levasseur contained himself with difficulty before that irony.

"They were in the Dutch brig."

"I don't remember that ye mentioned that before."

"I did not. They are prisoners of my own—a personal matter. They are French."

"French!"

Captain Blood's light eyes stabbed at Levasseur, then at the prisoners.

M. de La Place stood tense and braced as before, but the gray horror had left his face. Hope had leaped within him at this interruption, obviously as little expected by his tormentor as by himself. His sister, moved by a similar intuition, was leaning forward with parted lips and gaping eyes.

"So!" said Captain Blood. "Who are they?"

His crisp, authoritative, faintly disdainful manner stirred Levasseur's quick anger. The blood crept slowly back into his blenched face, and his glance grew in insolence, almost in menace. Meanwhile the prisoner answered for him.

"I am Henri de La Place, and this is my sister. M. de La Place, governor of Tortuga, is our father."

Levasseur swung aside with an imprecation. In Captain Blood amazement quenched every other emotion.

"The saints preserve us now! Is it mad ye are entirely, Levasseur? Children of the governor of Tortuga, which is the one safe place of shelter that we enjoy in these islands——"

Levasseur broke in angrily.

"I have already told you that it is a matter personal to me. I make me alone responsible to the governor of Tortuga."

"And the twenty thousand pieces of eight? Is that also a matter personal to you?"

"It is."

"Now I don't agree with you at all."

Captain Blood sat down on the cask that Levasseur had lately occupied, and looked up blandly.

"I'll be informing you that I heard the entire proposal that ye made to this lady and this gentleman, and I'll be reminding you that we sail under articles that admit no ambiguities. You have fixed their ransom at twenty thousand pieces of eight. That sum belongs to your crew and mine in the proportion by the articles established. You'll hardly be disputing that.

"But what is far more grave is that you have concealed from me this part of the prizes taken on your last cruise, and for such an offense as that the articles provide certain penalties that are something severe in character."

"If you dislike my conduct we can dissolve the association."

"So we will. But first you'll satisfy the articles under which we sailed upon this cruise."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll be as short as I can," said Captain Blood. "I'll waive for the moment the unseemliness of making war upon the Dutch, of taking French prisoners and of provoking the anger of the governor of Tortuga. I'll accept the situation as I find it. Yourself you've fixed the ransom of this couple at twenty thousand pieces; and, as I gather, the lady is to be your perquisite. But why should she be your perquisite more than another's, seeing that she belongs by the articles to us all, as a prize of war?"

Black as thunder grew the brow of Levasseur.

"However," added Captain Blood, "I'll not dispute her to you if you are prepared to buy her."

"Buy her?"

"At the price you have set upon her."

Levasseur contained his rage that he might reason with the Irishman.

"That is the ransom of the man. It is to be paid for him by the governor of Tortuga."

"No, no. Ye've parceled the twain together—very oddly, I confess. Ye've set their value at twenty thousand pieces, and for that sum you may have them, since you desire it; but you'll pay for them the twenty thousand pieces that are ultimately to come to you as the ransom of one and the dowry of the other, and that sum shall be divided among our crews."

Levasseur laughed savagely.

"*Ah, ça! Crèdieu!* The good jest!"

"I quite agree with you," said Captain Blood.

BUT as, laughing still, Levasseur swung to his officers, he saw something that choked the laughter in his throat. Captain Blood had shrewdly played upon the cupidity that was the paramount inspiration of those adventurers. And Levasseur now saw it written on their faces how unanimously they leaped at Captain Blood's suggestion that all must participate in the ransom which their leader had thought to appropriate to himself.

It gave the gaudy ruffian pause, and whilst in his heart he cursed those followers of his, who could be faithful only to their greed, he perceived—and only just in time—that he had best tread warily.

"You misunderstand," he said, swallowing his rage. "The ransom is for division when it comes. The girl meanwhile is mine on that understanding."

"Good!" grunted Cahusac. "On that understanding all arranges itself."

"You think so?" said Captain Blood. "But if M. de La Place should refuse to pay? What then?"

He laughed, and got lazily to his feet.

"No, no," he continued. "If Captain Levasseur is meanwhile to keep the girl, as he proposes, then let him pay the ransom, and be his the risk if it should not afterward be forthcoming."

"That's it," said one of Levasseur's officers.

And Cahusac added:

"Captain Blood is right. It is in the articles."

"What is in the articles, you fools?"

Levasseur was in danger of losing his head.

"*Nom de Dieu!* Where do you suppose that I have twenty thousand pieces? My whole share of the prizes of this cruise does not come to a quarter of that sum. I'll be your debtor until I've earned it. Will that content you?"

It might have done so, but that Captain Blood was determined that it should not.

"And if you should die before you earn it? Ours is a calling fraught with risks, my captain."

"Curse you!" Levasseur flung upon him, livid with fury. "Will nothing satisfy you?"

"Oh, yes. Twenty thousand pieces of eight for immediate division."

"I haven't got it."

"Then let some one buy the prisoners who has."

"And who do you suppose has it if I have not?"

"I have," said Captain Blood quite simply.

"You have!"

Levasseur's mouth fell open.

"You? You want the girl?" he gasped.

"Why not? And I exceed you in gallantry in that I will make sacrifices to obtain her, and in honesty in that I am ready to pay for what I want."

He sat down again on the cask, and drew from an inner pocket of his doublet a leather bag. And whilst Levasseur stared at him, still agape, he untied the mouth of it and rolled into his left palm four or five pearls each the size of a sparrow's egg.

"You boast a knowledge of pearls, Cahusac. At what do you value this?"

The Breton took between coarse finger and thumb the proffered lustrous, delicately iridescent sphere. His shrewd eyes first dilated in amazement of its size and beauty, then narrowed to appraise it.

"A thousand pieces," he answered shortly.

"It will fetch rather more in Tortuga or Jamaica," said Captain Blood, "and twice as much in Europe. But I'll accept your valuation. They are almost of a size, as you can see. Here are twelve, representing twelve thousand pieces of eight, which is *La Foudre's* share of three-fifths of the prize, as provided by the articles. For the eight thousand pieces that go to my ship, I make myself responsible to my own men. And now, Wolverstone, if you please, will you take my property aboard the *Colleen*."

He stood up again, indicating the prisoners.

But at this Levasseur threw wide the flood-gates of his fury.

"Ah, that—no, by example! You shall not take her."

He would have sprung upon Captain Blood, but one of his own officers got in his way.

"*Nom de Dieu*, my captain! What will you do? It is settled, honorably settled, with satisfaction to all."

"To all?" blazed Levasseur. "*Ah, ça!* To all of you, you swine. But what of me?"

Cahusac, clutching the pearls, stepped to his side.

"Don't be a fool, captain. Do you want to provoke trouble between the crews? His men outnumber us by nearly two to one. Besides, he's paid handsomely for the girl, and dealt fairly with us."

"Dealt fairly? You——"

In all his foul vocabulary he could find no epithet to describe his lieutenant. He caught him a blow that almost sent him sprawling. The pearls were scattered in the sand.

Cahusac dived after them, his fellows with him, and for some moments they groped there on hands and knees, oblivious to all else. And yet in those moments vital things were happening.

Levasseur, his hand on his sword, his face a white mask of rage, was confronting Captain Blood to hinder his departure.

"You do not take her while I live," he cried.

"Then I'll take her when you're dead," said Captain Blood with cool indifference, and his own blade flashed in the sunlight. "By the articles it's hanged at the yard-arm ye ought to be. But since ye prefer it this way, ye muck-rake, faith, I'll be humoring you."

He waved away the men who would have interfered, and the blades rang together.

M. de La Place looked on, a man bemused, unable to surmise what the issue either way could mean to him. Meanwhile Blood's men, who had taken the place of his negro guards, had removed the crown of whipcord from his brow. As for *mademoiselle*, she had risen and was leaning forward, a hand pressed tightly to her heaving breast, her face white, a wild terror in her eyes.

It was soon over. The brute strength upon which Levasseur so confidently counted could avail nothing against the Irishman's practised skill. When with both lungs transfixed he lay prone on the white sand, coughing out his rascally life, Captain Blood looked at Cahusac across the body.

"I think that cancels the articles between us," he said. "If you will come to our anchorage you shall have your share of the other booty and dispose of it as you please. If you would sail with me again first make your peace with the Dutch and restore the brig and her cargo."

They went, the two prisoners with them; and, the division made, they parted company whilst Mademoiselle de La Place and her brother—the latter relieved now of his bonds—were conducted to the great cabin of the *Colleen* and left there in agonized bewilderment, conceiving that their escape was but from pan to fire.

MADEMOISELLE flung herself on her knees before her brother to implore his pardon for all the evil her wicked folly had wrought. M. de La Place was not in a forgiving mood. He answered her in bitterness.

"I am glad that at least you realize what you have done. And now this man has bought you, and you belong to him. You realize that too, I hope?"

He might have said more, but he checked, perceiving that Captain Blood stood in the doorway regarding them. *Mademoiselle* sprang up at sight of him and shrank away in fear.

Captain Blood came forward.

"*Mademoiselle*, I beg you to dismiss your fears," he said with gentle gravity. "Aboard this ship you shall be entreated with all honor. So soon as we are in case to put to sea again we steer a course to Tortuga to take you home to your father.

"And pray do not consider that I have bought you, as your brother has just said. I have but provided the ransom necessary to bribe a gang of scoundrels to depart from obedience to the arch-scoundrel who commanded them, and so deliver your honor out of all peril. Count it, if you please, a friendly loan, to be repaid entirely at your own convenience."

Mademoiselle looked at him with incredulity. Monsieur de La Place rose to his feet.

"*Monsieur*, is it possible that you are serious?"

"I am that. It doesn't happen often. I may be a pirate, but I'm not a low scoundrel like Levasseur, who should have stayed in Europe and practised purse-cutting. We dine in an hour, and I trust you will honor my table with your presence."

Mademoiselle came slowly forward, staring at him between dread and wonder.

"Oh, you are noble!"

"Not to my knowledge," said Captain Blood.

Abruptly she fell on her knees, caught his hand and kissed it before he could wrench it from her.

"What do you do?" he cried.

"An *amende.* In my mind I dishonored you by deeming you his like, by conceiving your fight with Levasseur a fight between jackals. On my knees, *monsieur,* I implore you to forgive me."

Captain Blood looked down at her, and a smile broke on his lips, irradiating the light-blue eyes that looked so odd in that tawny face.

"Why, child," said he, "it might be hard to forgive you the stupidity of having thought otherwise."

SORCERY and EVERHARD

A FOUR-PART STORY PART II

by Gordon Young

Author of "Bluffed," "Sir Galahad and the Badger," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

THE report that I, Don Everhard, had been murdered in Pittsburg reached me while I was looking for Hurgronje in San Francisco. Hurgronje was a magician who had used his "magic" to murder my friend Madame Kraschenin and steal her jewels. I had recovered the jewels; now I was playing my cards craftily to "get" Hurgronje while he still believed I had been murdered by one of his gang.

My quest brought me into the apartment of a foppish crook, "Lord Bob" Calversley. I sat there alone about midnight when Zoronna Symondi, Sorceress, rushed in.

Zoronna was in trouble. She appealed to me for help. I knew her anxiety was caused by something concerning Hurgronje, for he had her, like many other women, in his power. I went with her in a limousine to her apartment. She was bewitchingly pretty, truly a sorceress.

I had no sooner arrived than the door-bell rang. I slipped behind a screen and one of Zoronna's lovers, Remy Cantello, entered.

His conversation with Zoronna was that of a lover crazed by jealousy. He embraced her, and when she pushed him aside the screen fell. I faced Remy with my coat and hat pulled about my face and a gun in each hand.

I went through Remy's pockets and took much jewelry, pretending that I was a burglar. I forced Zoronna to bind Remy, and I bound and gagged Zoronna, but lightly. Then I left the room.

CHAPTER III

LORD BOB came home the next morning with a bullet-hole in his shoulder and a grin on his face. He insisted that I give the injured shoulder attention, mentioning that he did not like doctors—they being supposed to report to the police every suspicious injury they attend.

"A nice clean scratch," he called it. "A steel-nose rifle-bullet—thoughtful of the fellow, wasn't it? Cauterized my wound an' didn't touch a bone."

With a little assistance from me he quickly got to speaking of Zoronna; and presently he blurted out these words:

"I'm a fool, Don. But I love her. She doesn't know—though I've told her so over an' over. It can't be helped,

you know. She's one of the fatal women.

"She was serious for two minutes one day, and told me that never a man in the world could have her love. I don't understand. She's all fire and red blood.

"And say, old man, you may want to kick me all around the room, but one day— I didn't mean to do it, either. I know you've got a temper like a thunder-cloud. But one day— If you'd ever been right up face to face with her, looked at her, stared down into her eyes, you'd understand— And one day— Listen. First I've got to tell you she's true as gold, an' got lips like clam-shells— One day I told her *you* were Everhard."

He was stripped to the waist and sitting in a chair, holding a basin of warm water with his left hand while I washed the crusted and fresh blood from his shoulder. It was pierced with merely a flesh wound, and I am not without a little skill in the care of wounds.

I stepped in front of him and looked down questioningly into his anxious eyes.

I think I may say that no man ever gets to know me so well as to be at ease when I am likely to be angered.

I said nothing, and I made no sign.

I was thinking. Zoronna had not only known who I was, but she had urged Hurgronje to come. Yet if Remy's report was to be trusted Hurgronje did not know but that I was dead.

"Now listen, Don," Lord Bob ventured, made uncomfortable by the fact that I said nothing, "you're makin' a mountain out of a peanut-shell."

I said nothing.

"She's not goin' 'o tell anybody—she's prob'bly forgot it by this time. She's awfully forgetful about names."

"Yes?" I asked noncommitally.

"I told her before I thought anyway." Then with a burst of inspiration, "Fellow can't be responsible for what he does without thinkin', can he?"

I looked at him steadily, and for a time I was not at all confident that Lord Bob was so innocent about the matter as he appeared. He was very clever in many ways.

"It was all over that Pittsburg stuff," he explained. "She read the papers. You know, you couldn't miss it— For Heaven's sake say something!"

I said:

"All right. Go on."

"Well, she said you mustn't have been so much of a fellow as your home-town papers made out to let somebody sneak in an' cut your neck in two while you slept. What could I say 'cept that she didn't want to b'lieve anybody ever cut your wind-pipe? Not much! She poked a finger at a headline, an' I must 've showed it in my face, because she said—

" 'Isn't he dead?'

"All excited. I said I knew —— well you weren't. She didn't b'lieve me. She riled me up, made me mad, till I blurted it out—then I told her not to breathe it to a soul. She promised, Don. An' Zoronna's all right."

"Is she?"

"Stake my life on it— No, something really valuable. Stake that on it." And, reaching into his pocket, he drew out a roll of bills.

"Listen, Don; there's no use to look like you meant pistols and coffins for two——"

Eying the roll of bills, I said cynically—

"Another pair of shoe-buckles?"

"I was thinkin' of a cigaret-case. Said she didn't have one she cared about—an' if I don't spend it on her the tailor or somebody 'll get it. Think I take chances an' get shot, just to pay a tailor? ——, no. I got a sick aunt. When she dies I'll pay him an' the rest of 'em. That's what I tell 'em anyway."

"Did she ever tell you her life was in danger?"

"What the ——, old man? Her life—danger?"

"Yes. It's the usual way some women make fools of men. Need the man's protection, you know."

"She wouldn't pick me to watch her lap-dog from a tomcat," he said with such a note of rueful sincerity that I almost felt sorry for him. "She knows I'm a fool, Don. If I tried to change she'd run me off.

"She hates serious men. They annoy her. Fellows like you. You're awfully annoying, old chap. Just now, for instance—the way you're lookin' at me."

I fancied that Zoronna, who I was beginning to perceive knew many things that she did not reveal, knew that Lord Bob was better fitted than to guard lap-dogs. I knew that his nerves were steel and that he was unbluffable, and that his brains were far from being shallow as a saucepan; all of which made it difficult to realize that he

had really been so easily tricked by that woman. But she called herself for stage purposes a "sorceress," and she was even more of a witch-woman off of the stage.

"YOU met her, I believe you once said, in Paris?" I asked.

"I never said anything of the kind. That's where I met her—but how did *you* know?"

Lord Bob showed excitement, a nervous vivacity, though a kind of foolish manner that he had cultivated, was the nearest he usually came to agitation. But he was almost dumfounded by the little slip I had made. He had chattered so much whenever we were together, and mostly about Zoronna, that I never for a moment supposed he would remember whether or not he had told me of knowing her in France.

"How did I know? Evidently I didn't. I was under the impression something had been said of it."

"I never was in France. It was my brother. Understand? I'd be extradited in twenty minutes. My brother was a smart man. Poor chap—dead now. He trimmed the man that was President or is President—I forget which; foreign politics never interested me.

"Anyway, my brother's dead now. Cost a lot of money to prove that he was my brother. So naturally I'm not telling anybody I ever was in France."

"But," I said slowly, "you no doubt made an exception of Miss Symondi——"

"How the —— do you know so much?"

"—made an exception of Miss Symondi with your own confidences—as well as with mine."

That reminder tended to make him a little ashamed; so that by being ironic I was well out of what might otherwise have been an embarrassment if he had persisted in wanting to know *why* I mentioned his having met Zoronna in France.

"She can be trusted, Don. Trusted with anything. Anything."

I spoke coldly, slowly, not because I was really as sarcastic as it suited my purpose to appear, but because I wanted to shake him thoroughly. He needed jarring.

"Trusted, for instance, with Sin Chang's affairs?"

He sprang out of the chair, overturning the basin on to the floor—damaging a five-hundred-dollar Persian rug not yet paid for—and, gripping my lapel with one hand, stared at me and was too surprized for several seconds even to speak.

At last he let go of the coat, which he had seized with a menacing air, and his manner changed so as almost to take on something of sadness.

"No, you wouldn't meddle. I know it."

He looked away thoughtfully, and rapidly faced me again as he spoke with a note of apprehensive astonishment—

"But *how* do you know that?"

As I said nothing, and he could read nothing in my face, after a pause he went on, very unlike the traditional Lord Bob—

"I know *you*, Don—but I've got to know *that!*"

"When a young man, shabbily dressed, with putty stuffed into his nostrils to make him a mouth-breather, with a thin, straggling, straw-colored mustache hung on his lip——"

"You've shadowed me!"

His words were pure astonishment.

"—a slouch hat pulled low, but not so low as to conceal the wisps of hair of a very clever wig——"

"—— you!"

His indignation was getting hot.

"— sneaks through a certain Chinese tea-shop that is only a front for an opium-joint——"

"You, *you*, Don Everhard, to spy on me!"

The disillusionment of friendship was painful even in the midst of anger.

"—and does it frequently, but always late in the afternoon, yet returns to his apartment without a whiff of opium on his breath——"

"Get out! Get out of this apartment, right now. You may be a killer, Everhard; but, —— you, you are a dirty dog!"

With monotonous, even, slow words I went on, ignoring his interruptions—

"— I conclude that he must have some very important business with a certain Sin Chang, who is reached by one of the subterranean passages leading from that joint; and whoever has business with Sin Chang must prize secrecy very highly, and be cautious about confiding in women—even those that can be trusted with anything—anything."

By a severe effort at restraint he heard me to the end, then pointed toward the door.

"Get out!" he said chokingly.

I smiled slightly. His slender figure was

not muscular, and he was half-naked. No wonder he thought so highly of tailors. I told him so. It was the first time I had seen Lord Bob in a rage, and I found it a little amusing.

I intimated as much. It was perhaps cruel of me, for he had a plugged shoulder and was a friend that could be trusted as much as a man can ever be—though none can if there is a pretty woman in the case.

He said at last, and with good poise, that there was a gun in the drawer of a table—pointing at it.

"I'm going over there and open that drawer and get that gun. Then you are goin' to get out of this room an' never come back. And don't you ever speak to me if we meet."

I thought rather well of his courage to say a thing like that, for he knew that likely enough I had two guns somewhere on me, and he was fully aware that I could, and probably would, use them. He looked at me for some seconds, trying to read from my face what I intended to do; then he walked to the drawer and picked up the revolver, and whirled quickly with the gun leveled.

I had made no move, not changed the position of a finger. It took no bravery on my part to remain quiet and motionless, for I knew that he would not shoot—then.

He advanced a step or two, the gun outthrust; then petulantly threw it at the wall, exclaiming:

"Oh, —— —— you! Get out anyway."

I slipped a hand into a side coat-pocket and brought out a little note-book. I turned a few pages until I found what I wanted, and held it out for him to read; and after glancing at it, mystified, he took it, and I talked while his eye ran down the page, followed the writing on to the next page, and several pages after.

I told him that in the course of the previous evening I had seen fit to go through a certain stranger's pockets; and among other things I had, without being in the least aware of what it contained, appropriated the note-book, wherein, to my complete surprize, I had found a detailed and astonishing account of Lord Bob's surreptitious movements; and though there was no mention of Sin Chang, he—Lord Bob—must remember that I knew Chinatown and some things of its ways, subterranean and otherwise; and though I was no mathematical expert, and might possibly make a mistake in putting two and two together, yet I was fairly lucky at guessing; and that when a man who did not use opium went into Sam Wong's tea-shop repeatedly, nothing remained but the guess that he went to see the opium king who was reported to live down under the ground, and was quite generally known as Sin Chang, and was said to deal also in slave girls.

LORD BOB asked a hundred questions, interspersed with as many apologies. I told him that the man's name was evidently Remy Cantello, though a total stranger to me; that my business with him had been unexpected and inadvertent, though I had reason to believe that he was thrusting his rather long and well-formed nose into my affairs.

"Old man, *how* 'd you know I wouldn't shoot?"

"I am one of the number that you say are few, who know you are not a fool."

"Thanks. But I intended to. I knew *you* wouldn't shoot. We're a pair of idiots. Now this Remy person—who in the —— is he?"

I was likely to get into a muddle. I might confide fully in Lord Bob except that the witch-woman would get him into her enchanted apartment and probably knock to flinders all his promises of secrecy. If I did not explain to him he would probably babble in some way, give her a cue, and she would soon have everything out of him. I had no intention of trusting *her* at all.

"I don't know your business," I said. "Probably Miss Symondi does; but——"

"She doesn't!" he snapped, his jaws clicking. "You've bullied me enough over her. I love her 'cause I'm an idiot. You'd be one too if you ever met her—then we'd fight a duel an' I'd get buried.

"I'm going 'o put Sin Chang's knife to my throat an' tell *you*. No great secret, 'cept Sin Chang doesn't like tongues that wag. Usually detaches 'em from the throat."

He sat down and I finished dressing the shoulder, first putting some hot cloths on it to take out any chill from being exposed so long while we had quarreled; and as I busied about, he talked.

He minimized, I knew, his importance to Sin Chang, but admitted that he was in the Chinaman's pay. Very good pay, too. He

said that he had thought that not a soul knew it but Chinamen.

In order to keep up his rôle of an improvident fool—and perhaps to get a little more amusement out of life—he pretended to be always in debt, and occasionally dropped hints of a quarterly remittance from a grouchy relative. He swore luridly that he had nothing to do with Sin Chang's slave market, though he did not balk at anything else the Chinaman shoved on to him.

A police boat had given him what he called "this shoulder" the night before while he was visiting certain lobster buoys out in the bay and fishing up certain packages of opium that had been anchored there from a tramp that had ostensibly put in for repairs.

"Customs tightened up so you couldn't squeeze a pipeful in a barrel of turnips. Chink fishermen used to pull it in, but police took to watching and followin' 'em; so Jackman an' I go out on the little *Sea Breeze.* —— near run our legs off last night.

"Jackman's a nice boy. It's up to him to swear he steals the boat and uses her without my knowledge if they don't catch us both at once in 'er."

"But that roll of bills?"

"I was to throw it at the skipper of the tramp—help him pay repairs. I guess he was on the poop an' heard us go by. No lights or nothing 'cept noise and splash. An', Don, we were goin'! If the police ever got a glimpse at the size o' that engine which claims to be ten horse-power I'd go to Alcatraz for life.

"Recognize her? They could lay 'longside of her an' not know 'er as the *Sea Breeze.* That cabin's collapsible. Name's screwed on—big brass plate. We screw on another. Stick up a pole with some rags around it to make her look like she pretended to be a sail-boat—an' the police aren't searchin' for any cabin cruiser. They're pokin' into ever'thing on the bay from Sacramento down that's got poles on her—lookin' for that big engine, you know.

"Old chap, when we get to goin' there isn't anything in the water but the propeller. Take you out some night an' make a smuggler out o' you. A great life, Don. Beats poker. An' if they ever catch me, what judge 'll believe it—me, with a monocle an' a dainty little cane's head in my mouth?"

Before the morning was over Lord Bob, social dandy and fop, having got started, told me much of his life. It was interesting. He had been born in China, with a missionary father, of course, and had been thoroughly instructed in Chinese that he might the better carry on missionary work during his life.

As a youth he had shown an avid interest in reforming wastrel Europeans and Americans, or so his father had been induced to think; and eventually an American crook had used Bob's knowledge of Chinese to do some clever work for him, then carried the boy off to America. The basic advice of that exceedingly clever tutor had been:

"Make 'em think you're a fool, kid. Never be a wise guy."

And he had left no part of that advice unfollowed.

WHEN Lord Bob was dressed, looking very neat and stupid, his hair plastered down on each side from a part squarely in the middle, his arm resting in a black silk bandage, he came in and poked his slender cane at my nose, then remarked:

"I'm goin' introduce you to Zoronna—idiots love company. Not rivals, though. Maybe I'll only show you her picture. Don, why don't you ever get yourself in love? It 'd humanize you."

I had been waiting for him to come out of his room. I was not by any means through with him, ready to see him go philandering with a woman who, though she might not be so cruel—though possibly was more so—as the famous Locusta, poisoner for Roman emperors, was likely to be much more dangerous than if she dealt in wicked vials and diamond powders.

There was the chance that I wronged her, of course; but a woman can suffer a lot of such wronging without injustice from a careful man. There was an old Norse proverb that appealed to my fancy. It ran something like this—

"Believe any man thine enemy until his blade is red with thy foeman's blood; but trust no woman, ever."

"Look what you did to the rug with your —— note-book," he said, sweeping his cane at the water-spot made when he overturned the basin. "Persian rug, too. Imported—from Ohio.

"Well, Mr. Remy Cantello will never again get a report of a lean man in a shabby

suit with putty in his nose. Enlarged nostrils change the facial expression and make you a mouth-breather. That's No. 34 in 'Be Your Own Detective'—correspondence course. Four dollars down an' one per lesson. I'll lead Señor Cantello a merry chase——"

He would probably have chattered on for twenty minutes, so I did not wait for a pause, but interrupted him with the very pointed question—

"What do you know of Hurgronje?"

He almost had his back to me, flicking his cane at an upturned corner of a magazine page as I asked it. He did not move, but became motionless, as if instantly turned to stone.

For some seconds he stood so, then twisted his head slowly over his shoulder and with a pretense of idiotic vacuity, which was far from successful under the circumstances, asked—

"Who's Hurgy?"

I said nothing.

"Gee, got something in my eye."

He blinked and grimaced, mentioned "handkerchief," reached to his hip pocket—but I leaned forward, caught his wrist and twisted the gun from his fingers. He meant to shoot that time.

In my life it has been as important to have a pretty reliable idea of when a man would shoot as it was to be able to anticipate the pressure of his finger; and much of my so-called quickness on the draw has been due to a guarding watchfulness and such penetration of a man's moods and intentions as can be learned nowhere else so thoroughly as around the green-clothed table.

"All right," said Lord Bob as he backed into a chair and cast a bewildered glance at the gun which, still loaded, I had tossed at his feet. "All right—turn me up. Old Hurgy pays well. I can't bid against him. Sin Chang might if I'd go into the slave trade—but I won't. You mentioned Paris first. I might have known. You fooled me on that note-book, too. Señor Cantello serves you well—but, —— your soul, why 'd you come here, into my apartment, *as a friend?*"

I suggested that in moments of inspiration he had called himself an idiot, or something of the kind; adding that if really convinced that Hurgronje paid well, he might advertise the presence of Don Richmond, *alias* Everhard, *alias* Richards.

He blinked a few times, and shook his head slightly.

"You're a great poker-player, old man. I'm Little Boy Blue, asleep in the corn."

"What 'll convince you?" I asked.

"Nothing. *No*-thing."

"Nothing?"

"Hurgy's head on a platter—might. No plaster of Paris or wax," said Lord Bob.

"Why such skepticism?"

"I know Hurgy—and coincidences like this don't happen. No, they don't happen," he insisted.

Here was a situation that I had not counted on. His unintelligible obstinacy, his more unintelligible intimacy with Zoronna Symondi, his deadly dread of Hurgronje, were things of mystery that seemed pertinent to my affairs.

He sat quietly enough in the chair, except for a steady tap-tapping of his cane against the edge of the table; and in trying to think I found myself listening to that persistent pecking of ferrule against the polished oak. I shifted myself slightly so as to be more easily in a position to watch the door from the next room and tried to discover something I could say or do that would make Lord Bob realize at once that I was no associate of Hurgronje's.

But that tapping was beginning to be annoying, though I did not say anything. I am patient. However, I leaned forward and picked the gun from the floor, rose and paced the floor slowly, turning once or twice and getting nearer to the door each time.

Then, coming close and noticing that it was slightly ajar, I lunged against it with all my weight—and Mr. Jackman with his head bent low, listening to the telegraphic tapping of Lord Bob, was knocked unconscious.

I CAN not read the Morse code. I have tried to learn it, but dots and dashes are indistinguishable to my ears; but I can usually tell when anybody is tapping out a message, even when it is the comparatively noiseless patting of seemingly nervous fingers against the back of a card-hand. A poker-player must be on the alert for signals of all kinds. There was but one person and but one place where Lord Bob could be directing a message, so I had investigated.

Lord Bob slumped back into his chair, dropped chin to breast and looked at me

from under his brows, then said quietly:

"You win. It was my only chance."

"I'm going in the kitchen a minute," and I told him to come along, and get water to throw on Jackman. "When he opens his eyes, tell him to go to bed—and stay there."

I got my cache out of the gas stove without Lord Bob's noticing what I was doing, for he got out of the kitchen as soon as he could plausibly, and intended to bolt from the apartment. But I checked him. Jackman, with a dull, ringing, mystified and wet head, and all the while looking with a kind of submissive inquiry at Lord Bob, was put into the kitchenette and the door locked.

Then with Lord Bob again in his chair I swept the table, shoving everything to the floor, and began talking. I told him that since he considered the game was up he certainly could have no reason for not telling me the story; and I added sarcastically—

"If you make it sympathetic enough I may be moved to pity."

"Pity be ——, you man-headed snake. I've played the game an' kept my hands clean. No blood on 'em. I never shot at an honest man—whether he's a policeman or what. Never will. An' Hurgy won't have that kind.

"Well, some years ago in London, I got into Hurgy's lay. He had a great game—that esoteric deviltry—and gave rich women a new sensation. That was legitimate; gave 'em what they paid for. That was in London. He pulled something too strong, an' he ducked. When Hurgy ducks he doesn't leave a ripple.

"Later he sent for me to show up in Paris. I was parading under another name all this time. I didn't make a confidant of him or anybody else.

"Everything had been running fine in Paris for about six months when Zoronna showed up. The city was mad over her. Some way or other he got her to come to a séance, an' she really thought he *was* a magician, an' said so. She set the fashion, you know.

"That's how I met her—an' lost my heart. Kept my head. Just my heart.

"One day I couldn't stand it any longer. I told her he was a faker. Thought she'd faint. She stared at me—eyes big as walnuts; big walnuts. English kind. Never will forget.

"Lost my head then. Told her all about myself, from the bamboo cradle at Shanghai to the last minute. Real name an' all. Your bones 're covered with some dead man's flesh, so you don't understand.

"She was just nearly paralyzed to find Hurgy was a fraud. You know how it would upset a woman who pulled a lot of mystery on the stage, an' found she'd been taken in by a faker. I didn't see her again, though she told me to come back after the show that night.

"About two hours later a friend o' mine who stood right up close to Hurgy came to me all in a hurry, an' made my hair curl. I'd been a baby all the way. The aunt of the President had been coming to Hurgy an' he'd warned her of a 'terrible danger;' an' by Saint Solomon, I'd been wondering how he'd guessed right, for the old lady was soon murdered right in bed an' all her jewels stolen. Hurgy had done it—an' I'd been cultivating the old lady—hanging around, you know, like Frenchmen do with old dowagers that can get you invited places. She didn't know—Zoronna even hadn't known till I told her—that I was one of Hurgy's build-up men—steerers, you know.

"This friend told me the police had their eye on me and that Hurgy was getting ready to have the 'spirits' tell the wife of somebody away up that I did it.

"I ducked. I didn't even leave a ripple, either. Yes. Just one—a big one. I wrote a letter, a long one, to the commissioner or inspector or somebody of police, and told all I knew—squealed, snitched, turned traitor, gave Hurgy the double-cross. I left out all names except his an' my own, of course. But I told it all.

"I was a Swede student at Heidelberg by the time that letter reached Paris. I don't know what actually happened, but the papers—Paris papers—got excited over the sudden and mysterious disappearance of the mysterious Hurgronje. You know how they would make witty sport of that. Hinted at swindles and fake, but not a word of the murder. No, but they had enough to speak about the desire of the police to find a young man of my description.

"I know Hurgronje found out what I had done—about the letter. I've good reason for knowing. My friend—he was a sort of secretary of Hurgy—was found dead, dragged out of a river. He had a letter on him, written to me, but hadn't known where to mail it. Letter was printed, an' the police

couldn't understand it. Didn't even know who it was written to.

"But I got it, every word; and I got the warning that Hurgy 'd vowed he'd follow me to —— an' all over.

"I never killed a man. Never. Hurt one now an' then, maybe. There's just two I want 'o kill. Hurgy's one, and you—*you*, you cross between a snake an' a dead man, you are the other."

I really didn't blame him for the way he put it; but I was thinking that it was just two hours between the time he confided with Zoronna that Hurgronje was a fraud before the ill-fated friend had warned Lord Bob that he was a marked man. That impressed me as rather rapid work.

"And you haven't told Zoronna yet just why you ducked from Paris? No doubt she has wondered," I said sarcastically, myself wondering if he could really believe in her innocence.

"Think I'd tell her I was accused of murder—of murdering a woman?"

"Oh, you wouldn't? But innocence——"

"Innocence be ——. If I'd done it I'd tell her, an' say I'd been framed. She doesn't like to talk of Hurgy. Neither do I. Not to her; she was so taken in.

"She thinks I got into trouble through tipping her off. She says I'm a friend. Don't sneer either. I got only one good arm an' you've got two guns, but I'll soak you in the jaw."

I suggested that she had come to San Francisco to visit him, her one "friend." That made him angry. He'd never written her until she had been in New York; and she answered that it was "strange" he should be in San Francisco, for she was coming out, *incognito*, right away.

And I said to myself that Zoronna must be a real sorceress to catch at one grab two such dear enemies of Hurgronje as myself and Lord Bob within her slender little fingers.

I MENTIONED my Lord Bob's "brother." He eyed me with disdain, I seemed so stupid. He had maneuvered to give out that the man with the name he went under in Paris was dead; in fact had got hold of a body in some way, and as the "brother" had actually endured the scrutiny, and presented the corpse to the scrutiny, of police agents cooperating with Paris. . . . Oh yes, Lord Bob was a fool, but not in some ways.

"All right, Lord Bob. Now what about Sin Chang and Hurgronje?"

"You've guessed it, but I don't sell out."

"Don't sell what out?"

"Bah!"

The idiotic stubbornness of his was incredible.

On second thought he added:

"You know this much anyway: Sin Chang's got something Hurgronje wants. Hurgronje hasn't got anything Sin Chang cares a —— about."

But Lord Bob might not have so accurate an insight into the situation as he thought.

"You mean that Sin Chang has some gems, I suppose," I remarked.

"You ought to know. I'll bet Hurgy steals into heaven an' picks the diamond cobblestones out of the Golden Street. He'd do anything for money. Yes, an' you can tell him from me that Sin Chang has that ruby—big as a hen's egg and not a flaw in it."

"A bantam hen, a little pullet bantam's egg?"

"Bigger."

"And Sin Chang?"

"Slave girls."

"That's the only way the trade can be made?" I asked, feeling my way from question to question as one crosses a stream on unfamiliar stepping-stones.

"A trade, yes. But you assassins don't intend to do any trading. . . . What you going to do with me? Knife, bullet or the bay?"

"You have a preference?"

"No."

I changed the subject.

"Miss Symondi knows, of course, that Hurgronje is here."

"Not till I told her. She didn't know anything about it. Doesn't even want to hear his name. And look here, you —— —— ——, don't try to connect her up with me."

Again I changed the subject; and, telling him to think my question over carefully, asked what did he know that would make Hurgronje hate a man worse, be more infuriated against him, than anything else in the world?

"Knowing Hurgronje as you do, knowing his one great, mad passion, what would hurt him and enrage him even more than writing

such a letter as you wrote to the Paris police?"

He answered quick as a flash; and as he answered I drew the little black bag from my pocket, and did not pause to pour out the gems, but slit the bag, so that the flaming stones cascaded from the black silken prison and fell, bouncing and tumbling, with a myriad facets blinking and breaking and tossing the sunlight. They clattered on to the table, a bewildering assortment of large and unflawed stones, every kind of precious stones excepting pearls.

Hurgronje, I learned, did not care for pearls; he felt they were nothing but an animal growth, not stones at all. Which idea illustrates beyond suspicion of a doubt that he loved gems for themselves, above and beyond their monetary value; for there are few things more costly than well-matched pearls.

Lord Bob lurched forward and sat stupefied. He looked up at me and tried to talk but it was like a man strangling. For a time his throat was contracted so that he simply could not articulate; and he worked at his throat with his fingers as if in pain.

I went to the sideboard and brought back a glass of brandy that he gulped; then he dropped the glass to the floor and put out his hand. Tears oozed from his eyes; his face was almost scarred, so bitterly was he shamed at the venomous way he had talked to me.

Words were not needed; and few of them passed between us, for at no time had he hurt me, but rather by all he said and every moment of his attitude had increased my respect for him.

In a few minutes he was himself, a rather excited Lord Bob though; and his nimble fingers played among the gems, touching this one, pushing that one aside, uttering a comment here and an oath there. With surprizing dexterity he shoved all the set gems—the rings and collar and pin I had taken the night before—to one side; and of these he made a division, pronouncing one group "phony."

He was an expert in gems, as a man would have to be to estimate successfully the value of stones worn by women who were to be lured into Hurgronje's extortionate séances. He grouped three large emeralds, and said that these very stones had been worn by the Parisian dowager; and vowed that he could have told those stones anywhere.

I told him how I had come to run counter to Hurgronje in New York, and why; though more by accident than design I did not mention Madame Kraschenin's name. I told him that by chance I had run across Remy Cantello, who suspected him of having been in Paris. And I was just about ready to risk telling him of Zoronna—though I feared he would have a temperamental outbreak and accuse me of defaming a sweet, pure character—when the telephone rang.

It was Zoronna.

As he listened his attitude changed. He tried to say something, but apparently she would not pause to listen. And she cut off, leaving him there with a dead receiver. He put up the receiver and turned toward me, and I knew that something was very seriously the matter.

"*Now* what's up?" I demanded in utter exasperation.

"I—I—I don't know," he said fumblingly. "Zoronna's just said she must see me—but can't till night, and that as I value *her* life not to let *you* out of my sight, and not to believe a word under any circumstances that you tell me."

"Too, too bad," I said, and added, a little enigmatically perhaps—

"You didn't by any chance let her know beforehand that I would be out of your sight all of last night, did you?"

He stared at me uncomprehendingly, then quietly:

"I don't know what you're talkin' about. I told her yesterday that I would be away all of last night—out of town."

CHAPTER IV

ZORONNA SYMONDI was the pivot on which everything seemed to turn.

She was mysterious, and, I thought, dangerous. I had thought so from the first glimpse of her graceful, alert body, sheathed in silk; from the first glance of her queer, cryptic, fascinating eyes, shadowed, as if symbolically, by the long black lashes.

Lord Bob was troubled, and impatiently watching the clock go round. But it seemed to me necessary that I should meet her first and have a little interview and maybe learn something. I knew better than to try to tell him what I suspected of

her. He would not have believed me.

He was not in much of a conversational mood after Zoronna's message. But I was. I talked to him of Madame Kraschenin, and for something more than the purpose of making talk. I had a suspicion that had been growing ever since I finally identified Zoronna's elusive resemblance to some one I had met and known before. I mentioned Madame Kraschenin's slightly Asiatic cast of eyes, her raven-hued hair, her singularly magnetic personality. I even drew on my imagination a bit and spoke of her eyes as inclined to be yellowish, but he did not see the significance; or rather did not at all associate her with the only other person, so far as I knew, that he had ever seen with eyes of the kind.

I asked Lord Bob if he was inclined to observe Zoronna's instructions about not letting me out of his sight; but of course he was not; and besides he had some matters of his own that needed attention—chiefly, I surmised, a little talk with Sin Chang that would relate to certain notations made in the handwriting of one Remy Cantello.

"Do you mind," he asked, "if I let Sin Chang know you're 'bove ground? And about Hurgy?"

I know two things of Chinamen, having been more or less thrown in contact with them from rather youthful days. They are the most unswerving and indestructible friends it is possible for a man to have.

That is one thing I know of them. And the other is that they are the implacable and unrelenting enemies, the most treacherous of foes, that a man can have.

And—though perhaps this is really a third thing—it is often utterly impossible to tell by their bearing and attitude whether they are friend or foe.

So far as I knew, Sin Chang and I had never met, our affairs never mingled; in which case, I being, so to speak, a neutral, he would not hesitate the tenth of a second to make any unscrupulous use of me in a bargain with Hurgronje. Chinamen have friends, which include tong brothers and relatives, and they have enemies; and all the rest of the world is of no importance, except to be used as occasion offers.

So I answered in such a way that Lord Bob concluded that I did not care to have him intimate to anybody that I was not tucked away in a Pittsburg graveyard; which, I realized, was a very inadequate precaution after he had let the truth slip into the very pretty ear of Miss Symondi: Sorceress.

NAPOLEON was an eminent psychologist. He won most of his battles before a shot was fired by the extremely safe and cautious maneuver of doing the unexpected. I have often reflected on what a great, what an extremely great, gamester was lost when he gave up his Bohemian life for the thunder and rattle of monarch-unmaking.

So I made a typically Napoleonic move, combining a slight risk with a sensational advantage, when I dismissed the taxicab before the Bayview apartments, entered with an air of assurance, took the elevator to the third floor, stepped from it and tried the nearest door, which interfered slightly in my plan by being locked. This obstacle was almost at once removed by a rather surprized French maid who no doubt wondered what tradesman's boy had mistaken the apartment's rear entrance.

By gestures and mysterious whispers I somewhat detracted her attention from suspicion and gave the appearance of having some secret and confidential business, until I had got inside and closed the door, whereupon the poor maid no doubt thought she was being garroted. Though so far as I recall it has been no more than three or four times that I have ever struck anybody a mere blow, I have taken care not only to keep in good health but to be continually in what athletes call training; and one needs to be both skilful and strong to overpower a woman without putting her unconscious, at the same time suppressing her inevitable yells.

It is generally taken for granted by people who know little about such things that the presence of a gun will silence any person; and while this is so true that a "Shh-hh" and leveled revolver may be trusted to keep any man quiet it is likely to have the opposite effect on most women, since a congenital urge to scream when surprized is nearly irrepressible; and this is particularly true of maids, servants, the less educated and more natural women.

This dainty little French girl did not yell, for my fingers closed tightly on her throat. I tripped her so that she lost her balance, then drew her stumblingly against my left shoulder, and with my left hand

thrust a prepared gag into her wide-stretched mouth. Her hands, of course, clawed at my fingers about her throat; and in such a circumstance the party always opens the mouth as wide as possible, so that I prepared for it in advance.

She was an extremely pretty little maid, and when she realized that she was not being murdered her eyes flashed fierily at me, and her slender little waxen fingers had a cat-like ferocity. Her toy-like slippered feet might have made a racket on the floor, for she was all energy and determination, but with a certain necessary roughness and expediency that were not nearly so brutal as may seem, I quieted her noiselessly and entirely, so that she could do nothing but wriggle slightly after being bound and put into a chair. She probably thought my apology was ironical; but it was not, as I rather admired her spirit.

Had she had the use of her tongue she would not have pleaded with me. Her eyes said as much. I do not like to be pleaded with anyway. It is irritating, particularly in women, who are something like children in their readiness to whimper when caught and held, yet when released will instantly torment you to catch them again; and if again caught and held will whimper and promise, yet if released will at once insist upon being caught still again.

That pretty little vixen wanted to scratch my eyes out and used no dissimulation about it. I wonder if in her wildest speculation and guessing she ever came near the truth regarding the fine—and I estimate fineness in things of the sort solely by the cost—set of furs which eventually came to her with a card that told her nothing except:

> From a real admirer, by no means unknown to you.

I perhaps should not have spent so many words in describing that incident, for while carefully going from room to room I located another person moving about beyond a door at which I listened. The footfall was that of a woman, but not, I became sure, that of Zoronna. I might have known that Zoronna could not do with less than two maids.

I then did a quite simple and entirely effective thing. Since I must take this woman entirely by surprize, and could not hope to do so by slipping into the room where she was, it was naturally necessary to get her to come entirely unprepared and without suspicion into the room where I was.

I glanced about for a suitable object and located a fragile blue vase—worth, I discovered afterward, something over fifteen hundred dollars, the present of a foolish connoisseur in knick-knacks—and I merely dropped the vase so that it struck just beyond the rug, on to the bare floor.

The attention of the person in the next room was instantly attracted. She paused, listened, spoke the name of the maid I had just disposed of, then came to the door to investigate.

She opened the door behind which I was concealed, at once saw what had happened, stepped inside, was throttled, lifted clear of the floor so that the beating of her feet would not set people in the room below wondering.

She did not begin to have the temper and courage of the little French girl. This woman was hysterical, or would have been if I had given her the opportunity for showing it.

SO IT was that with little effort and no real danger to speak of I was in possession of the apartment of Zoronna Symondi: Sorceress; and for no other reason at all than that I wished to surprize Miss Symondi into an interview which I was determined to make quite confidential, on her part at least. I was curious to look about at my ease and see what I could find; and though I may use some of their methods, I am neither a burglar nor a blackmailer, but there is nothing sacred to me about anybody's secrets if I think that they are connected with my own.

So, having disposed of my two prisoners in the pantry where they were, I thought, least likely to be located by accident if any one came into the apartment unexpected, I set about going into drawers.

I uncovered an incredible amount of jewelry and trinkets that looked valuable; I peeked upon neat pile after pile of silken garments—I call almost all expensive-looking cloth silk—and in closets came upon long rows of filmy and heavy-textured gowns; I found a bewildering array of feminine things—including the astonishingly vast mirror that covered almost completely one side of the wall. Its frame was at least two, perhaps twice as many, feet wide, and made of ebony with scrollwork of

silver. If it could only have reproduced the pantomime visions that had passed through its brilliant crystalline depth, and vanished! The spaciousness of the thing—it extended from ceiling to floor—was such that for the first time I seemed really to see myself in a mirror; and I lingered perhaps a suspiciously long while for one who was under the opinion that he had no use for a looking-glass beyond watching it as he practised variations of false shuffles and bottom-dealing.

The drawers and writing-desk gave up nothing that I wanted, and I replaced everything with a care that left no appearance of their having been disturbed. I then went into boxes and discovered more of those adornments used in the mysterious ritual of making a woman beautiful; and was almost unpleasantly affected by the profusion of scent, the perfume, that arose.

It would be endless to attempt to mention, even in my ignorant inadequate way, the numerous bottles and jars and queer little instruments that were on and in, and seemed almost to float and hover about, the expansive dressing-table. I have rather idly wished that I had taken the time to count merely the hats that I peeped at; there were at least twenty, and I am wilfully conservative. But I found nothing I cared to meddle with.

Then I went into the trunks, not deeply of course, for where I discovered layers of cloth I turned aside. The greatest secrets in the world might have been hidden in the folds, but the search would have been too labyrinthine, an infinite labor. Much that I stumbled on to was undoubtedly a part of the trappings and paraphernalia used on the stage; but I limited my prying mostly to the tills and their compartments.

And when I came to a little steamer trunk that was practically empty, and contained stuff of one kind and another—pieces of ribbon, wired trimmings, and such—that seemed of no importance, my first impulse was to pass on. But I was attracted to this trunk by its resemblance to another I had seen, and had something to do with, once upon a time in assisting a very good friend who had reasons of his own for not wishing the almost unfoolable customs officers to know too much about him and his business. He told me then that trunks of the kind were made with secrecy, sold at a high price and in an extremely limited number only to trustworthy persons. They were innocent-looking things, and distinctive in appearance only through little "ornaments" that disguised certain mechanical necessities of the workmanship; and in order to make these trunks serve the purpose for which they were intended the market was occasionally flooded by others, entirely "innocent" but the external duplicate of the smuggler's case.

All of which seems a rather elaborate prelude to the statement that these trunks merely had a false top, a false bottom, and false sides. But they were so firmly and masterfully made, the hidden space so well calculated, that they were entirely above casual suspicion, and, unless one knew the designed way of opening them, could not be investigated except with an ax. What it amounted to was two trunks, so carefully weighted and adjusted that no one of them could be distinguished from the more common trunk that any merchant might have.

The device was originally invented, I understood, at the expense of a certain European government that wished to give its diplomatic service a safe conveyance; but the inventor was tempted beyond his patriotism and sold the secret to a rival government; and then, perfecting it in a most unexpectedly simple way, was again tempted by gentlemen sufficiently interested in a safe smuggling-conveyance to become a silent partner in a trunk-manufacturing establishment.

A roundabout way, indeed, of saying that I came upon what I thought I wanted to find. I pressed two little "ornaments" at once and lifted out the false bottom, and I came upon papers in varying conditions of age, all written in some outlandish language of which I—a reader of French, a speller-out of German, and a fumbler in one or two other languages since the exercise of dabbling with them has entertained idle mornings—knew nothing. I made a selection that could scarcely be called judicious, but trusted to luck to appropriate something that might eventually be of service.

So I helped myself in the false bottom of Zoronna's trunk; but when I had lifted out the lid I came upon some photographs.

Many of these were photographs of Zoronna at all periods of her career, theatrical photographs, which she seemed to cherish.

But among them I found one that I seized upon and held up with a disturbing sense of incredulity; a group photograph it was, old and old-fashioned and foreign, of what appeared to be a family in curious, outlandish costumes—a family of four people; the father, the mother, a girl of about ten or twelve and another girl of about three.

If either of the children was Zoronna I could not have known it from the resemblance, though I suspected it. It was upon the mother that I looked, and as I stared her face seemed to detach herself from the pasteboard and swim in a kind of mist, much like the image one sees in a crystal—or like the image one is said to see. I never had any luck in that sort of thing though I have had the curiosity to try it.

I blinked a time or two and the face was again a part of the family group. I slipped the photograph into my pocket and readjusted the trunk. All the searching that I cared to do was over. Though I might not possibly myself be able to reach Hurgronje, I carried his death-warrant in my pocket.

THEN I went into the pantry to make sure that my prisoners were all right. The little French girl had loosened a hand, and when she saw that I would discover it she slapped my face—slap, smack, crack!

"Little Miss Tiger," I told her, "you are so young that I overlook your indiscretion—but it must not happen again."

She had spirit, that young lady. And somehow or other, during those days from the Summer of '14 on, when all the world was wondering anxiously whether France could hold or would break, I got an incommunicable sense of security and confidence out of the remembrance of that pretty, fragile little French maid whose spirit was unbreakable, whose temper uncompromising, and who had no more fear in her than an archangel.

The other woman had fainted, and came to under a splash of a glassful of water with terror staring from beneath her eyelids. A very absurd and tasteless simile, I suppose, to compare a gagged and bound little servant girl with a magnificent, anguished nation that raised a wall three hundred miles long of living breasts; but a race has no more spirit and courage than its women, and it is very significant that a warrior maid is the patron saint of France.

I went into the front room where Zoronna had entertained me the previous night, sat in a chair near the thick yellow curtains, and waited. The screen had been removed or I might have taken a seat behind it, but the curtains would be screen enough, and though they did not quite touch the floor I realized that the background of carved low paneling would make my black shoes inconspicuous, particularly when a chair was also in front of them.

I wanted no more of a hiding-place than would protect me until Zoronna was well into the room. I was not afraid of *her* screaming unexpectedly, for she had had training enough to respect a gun—and it is a curious thing that the people who are themselves most dangerous and lawless most readily respect the other person's threatening weapon.

Watch and wait is one of the things I do well, do nearly as well as the distinguished personage who made the phrase, and the example, of "watchful waiting" famous. Hours slipped by, but I did not move, except to go in once and retie Mlle. Guyot's small feet, since she had partially kicked them loose and was trying to make a great racket with her stocking feet—I had removed the Cinderella-like slippers—in the expectation of attracting help.

At that time I asked whether she would keep quiet if I removed the gag and eased her bindings to let her rest a little; but she shook her head vigorously. She was above both lying and compromise. The other woman had fainted again.

I readjusted the pillows I had placed under their heads, drew down the blind of a window through which the afternoon sun was streaming, asked them to pardon my seeming cruelty, for which their mistress was really to blame by her delayed appearance; and I withdrew.

The telephone rang three or four times, and I was tempted to take the receiver from the hook, but knew that the connection had been made through a switchboard in the lobby and was afraid that I might arouse the suspicion of the girl there; for if there is one thing more certain than another it is that switchboard girls in apartment-houses do a lot of listening. As I experiment with almost everything that occurs to me, I had practised a little at imitating the feminine

voice; but had had sense enough not to have confidence in my impersonation. So I clapped a hand over the annoying bell and let it ring until the operator concluded nobody cared to answer.

The afternoon sun dragged itself out of sight. Twilight came on, filtering darkness into the room and giving all manner of strange shapes to familiar objects; but I sat still except at such times as I heard the elevator stop at the third floor, whereupon I hurried behind the curtains. This grew monotonous, for I was, as evening came and people began both returning to and leaving the house, obliged to jump up and down much like a jack-in-the-box in the hands of a delighted child. But I had no inclination to stand stiff-backed behind a curtain for an indefinite number of hours when I might sit, so each time I returned to the chair.

Some people grow impatient when required to wait, but they never make excellent poker-players; and the hours ticked away with me hardly looking at the watch. The house grew more quiet; the elevators ran less frequently. Nine o'clock gave way to ten, and ten was crowded out by eleven; midnight came, and a ragged moon—two-thirds seemingly eaten away by some hungry sky-monster—wandered across the cloudy heavens; and with the aimless attention of an idler I watched it until, warned by the clank of the closing elevator door, I slipped behind the curtains.

It was after one o'clock; and Zoronna came in—but not alone. Remy Cantello was with her. Both of them were agitated and in a slightly quarrelsome mood that showed in their troubled restlessness and quick flashes of speech, though it soon appeared to me that Zoronna was acting her part.

It was no doubt her intentness on the conversation, the rather prickly conversation, with Cantello that caused her to overlook the absence of a maid and not to notice that no lights were burning. She switched them on and came into the room with a manner of petulant indifference.

She removed her hat and tossed it carelessly at the chair before my curtain, then jerked off her furs; and they never reached the chair but fell to the floor, and lay unnoticed. Her coat was swept from her shoulders and fell about her feet, though she seemed to have taken a step or two backward toward the chair with the nearly unconscious intention of having it fall there, on top of the fragile hat of feathers, chiffon and velvet. She was vibrantly alert, and shook her head to settle the bobbed semi-curls, then turned toward Remy, who had slumped into a chair, hat and stick in his hands, without removing his light overcoat.

"I TELL you," he said, "Hurgronje's a fool. So are you."

"And what are you, to say so?"

"I can take liberties. He knows me."

"Am I then such a stranger to him?"

"Don't be an idiot, Zora. It's all for your own good. I love you."

"I know. I know. I know!" she answered with careless cynicism, snapping a cigaret-case and scratching a match.

So it was that sentences and scraps of sentences rushed to and fro before anything came up that was of interest to me. I gathered that Cantello disapproved of certain plans upon which Hurgronje had set his heart and in which he was not discouraged by Zoronna. They had evidently come from a meeting with the charlatan; and I listened patiently in the hope of hearing where he could be found, since I thought that accidental information would be more reliable than what I might extort.

I did not learn as much as I would have liked, and nothing that seemed worth while for all the time I had lost—except that the time was of no value to me. Without the tedium of relating what each said, I may put down that Cantello was urging her to run away with him, and advanced as the major part of his argument that Hurgronje's fortune was on the decline, that the loss of his precious collection of gems seemed to have given him a mad streak, that he was absolutely crazy to think he could swindle Sin Chang out of his opium monopoly, and was a lunatic to go to the trouble and expense of fitting up a magnificent residence in the expectation of profitably taking up his "magic" and "esotericism" after he had settled accounts with the Chinaman.

Cantello was no fool; at least not in all respects. His reasoning was worth attention; and he reproached Zoronna for seeming to have encouraged the Devil's Master—as Cantello more or less ironically called him—in such plans.

Zoronna retorted that he had encouraged Hurgronje in a project more foolish than any of those; but Cantello replied that it was

nothing of the kind since the plan of frightening those negroes was very simple and would be effective, and did not involve anybody outside of Hurgronje's own ménage.

"I wonder," said Zoronna thoughtfully, looking at the disgrunted Cantello, "how you would feel if you discovered that he could conjure a dead man before him?"

Cantello laughed sneeringly: "Not half so scared as Hurgronje would himself be. You know. I've often thought in all his mummery and mumbling and tampering with incantations and things of the kind, that he might get the surprize of his life by stumbling on to the real thing. I've wished it would happen."

"You believe it possible? No?"

"Aw, don't try to get on my nerves."

More seriously:

"I believe anything's possible. But Hurgronje's going to get the worst of it if he fools with that chink."

Then, hurrying on to override some remark she tried to make:

"I know he looks wise and tries to make us think that he has something up his sleeve for Sin Chang—but did you ever notice the size of a Chinaman's sleeve? And say, what were you two talking so long about? I heard that —— gambler's name three times. I think I've done enough for Hurgronje to be trusted with what's going on. What was it, Zora?"

She laughed at him and snapped a finger but I did not think there was so much carelessness in her manner as she wished to assume.

"He was telling me it was a good thing that scoundrel was dead——"

But the telephone rang. She broke off abruptly to answer, and had just spoken into it, when Cantello jumped up and putting a hand to the mouthpiece, and whispering rapidly, said—

"If that's Hurgronje don't let on that I am here."

His alarm was evident. In the second that followed she gave him a quick, shrewd glance, then again spoke into the telephone, but her eyes remained on him. The conversation on her part was something like this: "Yes . . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes;" and, hanging up, she cried:

"That's Hurgronje! He's coming right up!"

"Right up! He's not here?"

"In the lobby."

"Good Lord, Zora. He mustn't find me. Where can I hide?"

He glanced swiftly around him, and though there were three other windows, heavily curtained, his eyes rested right on the one in which I had pricked tiny peepholes.

"Hide!"

The word and voice pronounced it impossible.

"You must go, Remy. Quickly—at once."

"Yes," he agreed mechanically, his eyes still wandering about the room. "He mustn't find me. Told me to deliver this —" Cantello pulled a thick heavy envelope from his pocket—"to Sin Chang—right away. That was three hours ago. Zora, what do you suppose he wants?"

Zoronna's voice rose earnestly:

"You must go. The back way—it's safer."

"But, Zora, what can he want? He's followed us. Hurgronje's disliked me ever since I told him it was crazy to meddle with Chinamen. I don't trust him at all."

"You must go," she said, pushing on his shoulder; but he turned around stubbornly.

"Zora," he demanded tensely, "Hurgronje's said he'd kill you if you ever loved a man. Zora, it isn't *him*, is it—you love?"

"No-no-no-no!" she cried in frantic exasperation. "It was because love makes people silly. Like you, now. Go, Remy! You must!"

"Zora—" his hands reached out to grasp her, but she stepped back evadingly—"if you ever do, I'll kill him and you, too!"

"All right—I hope you do. But go! Remy, you must go!"

"Remember, Zora, any man—and you, too!"

"If Hurgronje finds you— Oh, Remy, we'll both be ruined!"

The muffled clang of the elevator door as it closed after some one got out was heard in the room.

Remy looked about with something of the air of a man who finds himself trapped.

She whispered frantically—

"My ——, go!"

A knock came on the door.

Remy nodded, and, opening the door of the next room, whispered—

"I'm going."

SHE paused, motionless, until he had stepped through the door and closed it; then she turned and ran across the room to the other door where another and more impatient knock was demanding her presence.

But Zoronna had no sooner turned her back than Remy Cantello peered through the doorway, then slipped swiftly and noiselessly into the room again; and with the directness of a man who has already thought out his plan sidled in behind the curtain of the window nearest to him.

Of course I could not help wondering what would have happened if he had come a few feet farther and crept in behind my curtain; the situation was interesting, and complicated enough as it was.

For a moment or two Zoronna was very much absorbed at the door, which she had opened only narrowly. She whispered inaudibly, and said, "Sh-h-h!" then drew the door softly closed, hurriedly recrossed the floor and went into the next room. A hasty glance around must have assured her that Cantello had withdrawn, for she returned almost at once, and, throwing the hallway door open, said:

"All right; come in. I had to make sure the maids were out of the way. One can never tell about servants."

I was set and tense for a glimpse of Hurgronje. Instead Lord Bob came strolling in, and with his foolish air of boredom.

No doubt it was purely my imagination but I fancied that I detected some queer, slight, muffled sound from behind the curtain on my left. But as neither Zoronna nor Lord Bob appeared to notice it perhaps I was mistaken.

I do not know how many rôles Lord Bob could have played, but the stage was deprived of an excellent fop when he took to crime.

That may have seemed no time for a foppish rôle; but he appeared to think that Zoronna would have liked him less, perhaps have been irritated, displeased, if he showed any trace of earnest affection for her. He concealed the emotion and eagerness that I knew he then felt with a manner suggestive of boredom.

He said it had been a fine night for walking; that he had been walking up and down the sidewalk across the street for half the night. He needed the air. He just happened to notice a light in her apartment so he came to remind her that early that morning she had invited him.

"Oh!" she said quickly, catching hold of his arm. "Oh, Lord Bob, I'm frightened almost to death. Where is Everhard? What did he tell you? Anything?"

Lord Bob looked at her studiously for a moment, and he was on the verge of being serious. But he was a thorough actor.

"Oh," he said languidly, "that fellow climbed down the fire escape an' got away. What's up? You act all fussed. He wouldn't hurt anybody."

"Listen."

Her hands went to his shoulders.

"I am terribly frightened— I— I— I don't know what to say."

She stopped. There was silence, a long pause. He stared at her, but the monocle was in his left eye, and though his gaze was earnest he looked rather foolish even then.

At last he drawled:

"Y-es. I get that way too. Too much gin—horrible dreams. You know. Absinth an' gin. Good, but awfully bad. What's the racket?"

"Do be serious! Do, do, please. I'm going to tell you—everything. But be serious."

Her voice was strained, and I had no doubt of her earnestness.

"Serious? Then you'd tell me not to be a fool. I've tried, you know. But what's the matter, Zoronna? I am serious."

With his last sentence his tone changed. He was serious. The monocle fell from his eye.

"You'll hate me when I'm through. But I must tell you. There is no one else I can trust—that I want to trust, Lord Bob. Don't stand . . . . There . . . . Now . . ."

Lord Bob sat down, and she tossed a cushion to the floor and sat with feet crossed before him; and she looked at him a long time before she said anything.

Perhaps she studied out how most shockingly to begin. Women are like that at times.

"Hurgronje took me when I was a little child. I hated him even then, but I've been afraid of him ever since. I don't dare disobey him—I just don't dare. I'm just a slave. When he says, 'Come,' I come. When he says, 'Go,' I go."

At her first words Lord Bob had almost started from the chair. Then he had

settled back, and now he was shaking his head slightly, and half-smiling. He didn't believe it. He said:

"O-ah. It was I told you in Paris he was a faker. What're you tryin' to do with me now? You nearly fainted then."

"Fainted? I nearly died—that you, that anybody, should be so little afraid of Hurgronje! Up to that time it had never crossed my mind that one could do something he didn't want."

He tried to say something, but she swept his words aside and went on:

"Oh, I knew all about him and about you. It was part of the game that I, the 'famous' Zoronna Symondi: Sorceress, should patronize the mysterious Hurgronje. And—and one of the servants overheard you, and she told Hurgronje. He came near killing me. And you—you barely got away."

I was not quite sure that I believed that explanation. It was plausible. But explanations that women give when they sit at one's feet are always plausible.

Lord Bob was shaken through and through. It was hard to believe, and he could not doubt; that is, it was hard for him to believe that Zoronna the beautiful was in league with Hurgronje the diabolical.

She went on feverishly, leaning toward him, a hand reached out to his hand:

"He knows you are here—in this city. He hasn't seen you, and I've denied it but he is sure. He doesn't want to cross Sin Chang just now, and you're Sin Chang's man, so you may be safe a little while.

"But when he finds out for certain, sooner or later, Lord Bob, he'll kill us both! You because you are you, and me because—oh—because—well—he's told me he'd kill me if—"

She did not finish. She stopped, and both her hands fastened on to his hand, that hung motionless just over the arm of the chair.

He said nothing. He seemed too stunned to speak, too stunned to move. He looked down at her with unblinking eyes, dully staring.

"And last night," she said so low that I could scarcely hear, "I tried to kill him."

"What!"

Lord Bob's face was filled with astonishment and fear.

"I tried to kill him," she repeated with a suggestion of hopelessness, of futility.

"But, Zoronna, you didn't!"

"Yes—yes—yes," she whispered feverishly. "That man Everhard—I brought him here. I tried to get Hurgronje to come. I knew Everhard would kill him. And—and"—her voice rising—"he knows it now and I'm afraid of him—afraid he will kill me!"

"Hurgronje!"

"No-no. Everhard. Didn't he tell you? Didn't he say a word? No? Then he does mean to kill me. If he'd told you—talked it over with you— Then he suspects you too. Oh, he's so cold—so—so—Just to remember his eyes frightens me! Oh, I'm sure he thinks I tried to trap him, and now he knows I'm Hurgronje's woman——"

"Hurgronje's woman!"

Lord Bob sprang up, jerking his hand away, overturning the chair. His face was distorted with pain.

She leaped up with pleading hands outthrust, and cried:

"Oh, not *that!* I'm less to him than one of his horrible hollow statues. But Everhard knows I'm his—his— That I'm one of his gang. And that man will surely kill me. I know it. He as much as said so."

Lord Bob asked—

"When?"

And Zoronna hurriedly sketched out what had happened in a way that must have been more astonishing to the ears of Mr. Remy Cantello than to my own.

BUT presently there were some things interesting to my ears, of special interest to them.

"Don't trust that Everhard," she cried warningly.

"He is a mighty good friend, Zoronna, when he is a friend."

"But he's no friend to me. He hates me. I could see it in his eyes. Oh, Lord Bob, don't trust him. Promise me. You won't trust him, will you?"

"Trust him? How do you mean?"

"Don't tell him of me. Don't——"

"That's just what I could do—explain—an'——"

"Don't. Don't. Oh, no—don't. He didn't say a word to you about being here last night—and he knew you were my friend! I'm afraid of him. He as much as told me over the phone to look out."

"But I don't understand—" said Lord Bob.

"You don't need to understand. I never saw a man so cold—so—so—I don't know what."

"That's true enough. He's cold-blooded as a frozen snake, and he never forgives an enemy. He'll do anything, that fellow, to get a shot at somebody that's stepped on his toes. You know," he exclaimed with the manner of one who has a surprizing, new thought, "I b'lieve he came to San Francisco just to get Hurgronje!"

"And everybody that's with Hurgronje."

"But if I tell 'im that——"

"You've promised you wouldn't tell him. Don't let him know that you know. Oh, I don't trust that man. He's dangerous. I'm terribly afraid of him, and that's all there is to it."

Possibly, I say possibly, had it not been for the presence of Cantello behind the other curtain I might have stepped out and said something to reassure her. There was no doubt as to her fear; or, from her point of view, that she had good reason for it. But even at that I was not wholly unsuspicious of her.

"What the —— are we to do?" Lord Bob asked, very much troubled, and sitting down again.

She dropped to her knees in front of him.

She glanced about as if some subconscious sense were trying to warn her that eavesdroppers were in the room, or else because she was almost afraid to speak what she had in mind. She spoke in a whisper, a tense, imploring whisper.

She hated Hurgronje, she said. But she was afraid of him. She had prayed, actually prayed, for the courage to kill him. She had even gone into the room where he was—to kill him. But she couldn't. She simply couldn't—though she felt that the only way she could make atonement to the men who had loved her and given her things that Hurgronje took away from her, was by killing him.

He had used her as a lure. She spent all the money she could in dresses and furniture, in anything, because otherwise Hurgronje would take that too.

And then it seemed as if the devil, or somebody, had sent this Everhard. He was what people call a "killer," and he hated Hurgronje. From what she had heard she gathered that Hurgronje had robbed a woman that this Everhard loved——

"Killed her," said Lord Bob.

"Oh, my ——!" Zoronna exclaimed. Then she continued:

— and in revenge Everhard had gone right into Hurgronje's house, tried to shoot everybody, and had taken all Hurgronje's gems. Then something had happened at Pittsburg—she didn't know what. But Everhard was here, and they must use him to kill Hurgronje.

"Great Heavens!" said Lord Bob. "With half a chance he'll do that quick enough. I'll just tell him the facts in the case, and we'll all——"

"No—no—no! You mustn't! Nothing on earth will make him believe that I didn't try to trap him here last night. He would be suspicious. He wouldn't trust me—or you either——"

That was good logic. I would not have trusted her.

"— and we can't fail this time, because it's your life too, Lord Bob!"

By that time Zoronna's voice had grown above a whisper. She spoke tensely, and the last words came in a subdued cry.

Lord Bob leaned forward; he seized her by the shoulders and his eyes were bright with resolution. "I'll do it myself—myself. *I* will kill Hurgronje."

Her protest was instantaneous and frantic. Oh, he must not think of it; he must not try it! Hurgronje was guarded like a king from anarchists. He had a half-dozen murderous men on watch, night and day. Let Everhard run the risk.

"I'm going to Hurgronje," she went on. "I'm afraid to stay here—afraid of that Everhard. He might come some time. Besides, for some reason or other Hurgronje has told me to move into his new house. I'll find some way to get Everhard into it—and to Hurgronje. He may not get out, but he will kill Hurgronje."

Lord Bob sat back, his eyes shut tightly, and shaking his head. No, no never! He couldn't do that. That would be treacherous to Everhard.

"You don't know what a friend he is when he is a friend," said Lord Bob.

"All —— can't stop 'im, Zoronna. You saw those stories in the papers when they thought he was dead—they were true. He's like that. I can't double-cross him.

"Listen, Zoronna; you get me into Hurgronje's house, an' I'll take a chance on gettin' out."

"You'd never get out alive. No man

could get out alive. But Hurgronje must die, Lord Bob. He must! It means life to you and me. We could go to the ends of the earth, and some day he would find us.

"Oh, please, please! Everhard would never know—never suspect even if he did get out—that you didn't think he would come out alive. It's the only way, and you must do it."

"I won't," said Lord Bob, shaking his head from side to side. "You're—you're—I'm surprized—astonished at you, Zoronna. I don't— It's not like you."

"Oh, it *is* like me," she cried, flinging herself with arms outstretched upon him. "I love you! I love *you!* No man but you has ever heard me say that. None ever will.

"Oh, I'd give my soul—my very soul—to be able to kill Hurgronje myself. Even today I wore a dagger when I met him—but just to look into his eyes— And I can't.

"For me, Lord Bob! For *me*, to have *me*, for all time to have *me*, and go where we please, and live without fear of him, won't you do it? And what is this Everhard but a gambler and a crook? Sooner or later Hurgronje will kill him anyway.

"Oh, I love you—I loved you in France—I've dreamed of you every hour. But I haven't dared, dared even say it to myself, for fear of him. Oh, Lord Bob, my darling, my boy, even if you did do it, some one of those horrible men would kill you sooner or later. But this Everhard—won't you? Please—if you do love me—please—won't you?"

Her hands were embracingly against his face, her eyes were close to his eyes and implored him luringly.

Lord Bob dropped his head forward as if at once, in one and the same gesture, agreeing to the treachery and hiding his face. The best of men throw honor away when a woman whispers—

"If you love me——"

Then as if suddenly mad, crazed, she sprang back, rigid, from off his knees, her eyes staring fixedly over his head.

She gave a choked, inarticulate cry. Her hand flashed to her breast and up again, and the murderous oath of Cantello was cut short.

I did not actually see what happened, for I turned my head sharply to see at what she stared, and of course in so doing took my eyes from the tiny peep-holes I had pricked in the curtain. I could scarcely have been expected to remember them at such a moment. But I had seen and heard enough to know that she struck in defense of Lord Bob, near whose back Cantello stood. Perhaps he had stood there for some moments, having approached stealthily, unnoticed.

His had been no idle boast of death for her and whom she loved. I did see him sag unsteadily and slowly crumble face down near the long stiletto that had fallen from his own hand. Blood leaped from the breast-wound as if avengingly writing the crime on the white silken rug—writing in grotesque splotches that would, however, be translatable into the language of the Law.

BY ALL the examples I have read of in fiction or seen set forth on the stage in situations anywhere resembling the one that I was in, I should at that point have stepped forward accusingly and further astonished Lord Bob and Zoronna, who bent forward over the body of Cantello, then stared silently, horrified, into each other's eyes. It would have been more dramatic had I done so, but I was not looking for an opportunity to make a speech and I was not interested to see how nearly they could be shriveled by surprize. All that I wanted was to get out and away, undetected.

Lord Bob, no matter how reluctantly, had agreed to a proposal that put him outside of my friendship; for I was just then in no mood to be tolerant, and certainly I did not feel called upon to offer help in getting them out of their bad situation. They were distressed. They were terrified. They seemed not to know what to do. I had always found Lord Bob amazingly quick-witted and resourceful, but those times had mostly been in situations where his tongue could help him.

They spoke together in broken whispers. He, as if protectively, put his arms about her, and she, shuddering, pressed against him.

At last she said:

"My maids—maybe they're asleep. Oh, I hope— Wait here."

She started for the door. He followed. She motioned him back, but he followed

anyhow as if some other unexpected danger might come upon her. At the doorway into the next room they paused, silent in a long, tense embrace. Then, "Oh, I do, do, do love you!" she said in a low, broken voice; and there were tears running down her cheeks.

They went on into the next room, but did not close the door behind them. Quietly they went on toward the maids' room. When it seemed reasonably safe I slipped from behind the curtain, made one swoop toward the dead man's pocket and caught up the letter I had seen and heard him speak of, and softly passed out of the door into the hallway and down the stairs to the second floor from where I took the precaution of dropping off a fire escape.

CHAPTER V

THE next day Lord Bob tried to avoid me by staying in bed until I should have gone out. But I showed no indication of going out at all.

When I had come in the night, or morning, before, Jackman, with a prominent lump on his forehead, sat dozing in a chair with a burned-out cigar between his fingers and a magazine half-slipped from his knees. He had not heard me come in.

I am not naturally a noisy person, and with a little attention to the matter can be rather quiet. I did not know how he felt toward me for the bump, or what explanation Lord Bob had given, and saw no reason for waking him up to inquire. I went to my room and locked the door.

Then I examined the envelop I had taken from Cantello's pocket. It was a large, stout envelop with a heavy wax seal on the flap, and very little in it. With care I pried off the seal without breaking it except slightly around the edges. There was no address on the envelop, no mark to indicate for whom it was intended.

I opened the envelop—tore it open, for since there was no handwriting to duplicate and only a seal to restore, I saw no reason to waste time in being careful with the flap when I could buy a similar envelop at any stationery-store. So I tore it open and read a message that I did not understand.

It was a short message, and addressed to no person. The black, large, cabalistically engraved "H" at the top of the white, expensive paper—wholly unlike the Manila envelop—gave the only indication of the writer. None other was needed.

I have mislaid, lost, I suppose, the copy I made of it; and though I remember very well what it said the exact phrasing would have been worth repeating. It was at once formal and confidential, very cautiously worded; that is, diplomatic. Perhaps Hurgronje had, in spite of the seal, mistrusted Cantello.

It set forth to Sin Chang that though he, Hurgronje, was aware that the Red Moon was among the most valuable of the world's stones, though generally regarded as mythical; yet the price demanded by Sin Chang, and agreed upon, was surely in excess of the ruby's value; a fact that he mentioned again only to remind Sin Chang that immediately after its payment there was the other and more important matter to be arranged between them.

Naturally I wondered what under the sun Hurgronje could offer that would be in excess of the value of a ruby so distinguished as to be called a "red moon." That he would gladly give up his soul for it was believable; but that his soul was worth anything to Sin Chang was questionable.

"The other and more important matter"—and I doubted if Hurgronje did consider it the more important—referred, I supposed, to opium.

Sin Chang was said to control almost the entire opium importation into America; and he had—so underworld gossip, seldom so inaccurate as upperworld gossip, said—an incalculable bank-account. I could not begin to imagine just then what Hurgronje could offer. It seemed to be part of his delight, anyway, to pay with fraud for all that he bought. But here was evidence of a definite, specific bargain; to be followed by another and "more important" bargain, or agreement, or arrangement of some sort.

My thoughts were then scattered for a time that night by the arrival of Lord Bob. I snapped out the light and listened. Jackman had evidently awakened, perhaps relighted his cigar and been waiting. I heard him, in reply to a rather excited inquiry, say that I had not come in; but I heard nothing more, for the two men went to Lord Bob's room.

The next morning Lord Bob was reluctant about showing up. He perhaps was reading the papers in bed. I read them in a chair almost squarely in front of his door. I

did not want to miss him. I knew very well that he did want to miss me. Maybe his conscience troubled him a little.

The papers at the last minute of the city edition's press-time had thrown on to the front pages a black-typed story of some mysterious man who had "invaded" the apartment of Zoronna Symondi—however, the papers gave the name under which she had leased the apartments—bound the maids, looted it, and for some inexplicable reason had remained in it most of the day and night, then killed Mr. Remy Cantello, who for an equally inexplicable reason had come into the apartment. The body had been discovered by Miss Symondi and Robert Calversley on their return from the theater. This was most amazingly confirmed by the girl at the switchboard.

There was very little in the papers about the affair owing to the late hour of the crime's discovery; but that little included a passable description of myself. However as at least three out of every ten men one met on the street might easily have answered to such a general description as a little above medium height, light-eyed, thin-featured, and in a dark suit, I was not very apprehensive. The maids had not known my name; Zoronna and Lord Bob had not given it.

Jackman had plugged up the telephone, and would not admit reporters. Two detectives, however, called; and I kept out of sight while they talked to Lord Bob. He was more than a match for any detective, particularly when he was not really suspected of anything.

Zoronna had disappeared. What is called "foul play" by the newspapers was suspected, and on the part of him who was being called "the man of mystery"—myself, thanks to the story and description given by the maids. Lord Bob pretended to be anxious, but he knew nothing. So he said. He was a capable liar.

THE afternoon papers were full of excitement and conjecture. The police believed that Miss Symondi—though they had not yet discovered that such was her name—had been "done to death" by that mysterious man who had so boldly and desperately invaded her apartment, "obviously" for the purpose of murdering her.

I shall not go into all that, all the conjectures, rumors and so forth, for though it made a great stir in the news it did not have any influence on my part in the story. My name did not once crop out. I was supposed to be in Pittsburg, buried.

However at last, somewhere around the early afternoon, I had a conversation with Lord Bob that may be worth telling about.

After the detectives left I had Jackman say to Lord Bob that I wanted to see him. He came, wearing a dressing-gown, and with a tall glass of iced liquor to help his nerves. He looked pretty shaky, and he came in rather sullenly.

"Oh, there! A blood-spot on your hand!" I said quickly, pointing.

He dropped the glass, jumped, stared at his hand, rubbed it, then fastened half-alarmed, suspicious eyes on me.

I said that it must have been the way the light fell on his hand.

Sullenly he told me that I ought to look twice before I made any such remarks; that his nerves were upset anyway.

"What do you make of it?" I asked, tapping the paper.

He made a noise with his throat, an ambiguous, inarticulate sort of sound, and shuffled out for another glass of iced liquor. He came back stirring it with a long spoon, and glared at me with smoldering anger.

"Cantello," I whispered. "You said you'd lead him a merry chase."

"You've got no right to talk," he mumbled, looking into his glass.

Of course I asked with an air of innocence what he could mean.

"You know what I mean."

"No," I assured him. "Not exactly."

"What were you doin' in her apartment, anyway?"

He wanted to appear angry. He was really worried.

"Let me see. Did you give me some assurance that she was not connected with Hurgronje?" I asked.

He was startled at that. The glass almost slipped from his fingers again. He gathered his scattered nerves, and, drawing himself up, said earnestly—

"I swear to you that she is innocent!"

"Of what?"

"Of—of what you think. I know it."

He tried to be emphatic; but I asked—

"And what *do* I think?"

"You know what you think," he returned.

"I certainly do. That Zoronna Symondi would as soon knife a man as——"

He almost yelled, and the glass, empty however, did fall.

"I really don't blame her," I went on. "She is a wild little Asiatic of some kind. Put skins on her and turn her loose on the desert—she would be at home."

"You don't blame her— What 're you talkin' about?"

"Probably of what you are thinking about," I answered.

"No," he replied emphatically. "No," more doubtfully.

Then, determined to go through with his bluff, he said with a sort of impulsive explanatory manner:

"Gave us an awful shock—Cantello. We just opened the door—there he was! ——, wonder what he was doin' there?

"Old man, I know you didn't do it—but it looks bad. Those maids described you to a hair."

I was tempted to let him know the truth, but remembrance was too strong of how at last he had consented to Zoronna's urgent plea. I was only a "gambler and a crook."

I told him merely a part of the truth, which he already knew; and added that naturally I had gone again to her apartment to find out what she had been up to the night before. He made a feeble attempt to pretend surprize that she had ever taken me to her apartment, and asked why I had not before told him of it.

"She asked me not to," I said.

His comment was again inarticulate and muffled.

"Where is she now?" I demanded, referring to the fact that she had "disappeared."

The detectives had said so. Headlines declared it in the evening papes.

"How do I know?"

"You have a good idea, anyway. Remember this: I'm not a detective. Perhaps it's lucky for you I'm not. If so I would guess that you came into Zoronna's apartment *after* she had returned with Cantello. I would guess that she had tried to get Cantello out of the room before you came in. I would guess that he pretended to leave and hid himself. I would guess that then something happened that made him crazily jealous and he jumped out and that she killed him."

His eyes were wide and astonished. He sat motionless, almost terrified.

"Yes, *she* did it," I went on. "You don't wear a knife, for one thing; and for another your right arm is just about out of commission.

"Yes," I went on, petrifying him with astonishment at my amazing accuracy, "it is lucky for you that I am not a detective. The police pretend to think that the 'man of mystery' has done away with Zoronna. You know better. I'm the 'man of mystery.' "

"You would 've done something," he stammered. "The way you abused those maids."

"Yes. I would have made her tell me why, knowing that I was Everhard, she took me as she did to a room where Hurgronje was expected."

He started to say something but checked himself; thought the matter over, and finally admitted that it "did look queer;" but most earnestly he added that Zoronna was "innocent"—whatever he meant by it.

There was nothing more to be said unless I told him that I had been in the room all of the evening; and the time to tell that would be when he came offering a "chance" to get into Hurgronje's house.

I KNEW where, in all probability, Zoronna had gone. To Hurgronje. Lord Bob knew it, too. But he could not say so without explaining. He felt decidedly uncomfortable.

I came very near to asking him to explain what "magic" he had used on the switchboard operator of the apartment-house; but that would have disclosed that I knew instead of guessed what had happened.

"Say, I'm goin' to bed," he announced. "I'm sick. You'll excuse me, won't you? I'm knocked out—got chills 'r something."

He started off; but I called to him—

"Just a minute."

He stopped, but I waited for him to turn. I like to see a man's face when I am talking to him. Then he faced me, asking what I wanted.

"Tell me," I asked slowly, but purely as a matter of curiosity, "when did Zoronna— I mean did she ever meet Sin Chang? That you know of?"

"Say, you know a —— of a lot about things; don't you?" he said quickly, puzzled,

half-angry; and his question was not a question, but a statement.

"I don't understand you, Everhard."

I said nothing. He paused. Then:

"'Bout a week ago she wanted to see Chinatown. I took her through. She'd heard a lot about Sin Chang—wanted to meet him. He gave a dinner for her. Why?"

"Does she ever use opium?" I asked.

He swore angrily as if it were a question unworthy of answer, and went out.

Then I got hold of Jackman, who eyed me a little dubiously, and sent him out with half an envelop, told him to match it and bring me back two or three.

When they came I went into my room, and with a needle to hold the wax above a candle-flame, after an experiment or two I succeeded in softening the under part of the seal until it would take hold of the paper at the envelop's flap.

The figuration of the seal was not disturbed. One would have had to examine it with care, with much care, to discover that it had been tampered with.

When evening came on I ventured out.

First I went into a drug-store that like all other drug-stores had so far elaborated its apothecarian character as to have a soda-fountain, cigar-stand, and service for the developing and enlarging of photographs.

The sleek-haired young clerk, very youthful and not without importance, explained that I should have brought the negative of the entire family group in order to get the result that I asked for from the picture I presented. I let him talk until he had said all that he seemed to have memorized for such cases as mine, then repeated the original request to have an enlargement of the woman's head. Thereupon he made reluctantly some notations on a slip of yellow paper, and assured me resignedly—

"We'll do the best we can."

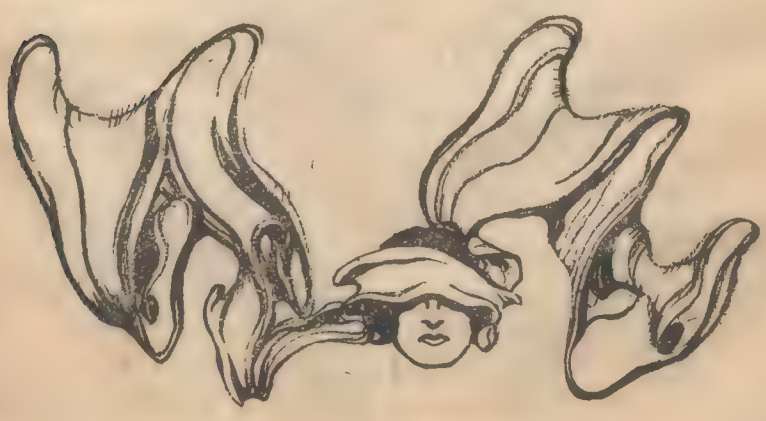
It would, according to the proverb, have been an impertinence to ask more of an angel; but I did not comment on that.

I then headed into the lights and shadows of Barbary Coast, where there was more of a chance of my being recognized, identified, than amid the crowd on Market Street. I pulled the brim of my black felt hat a little lower, turned up and buttoned my overcoat, and accepted the risk. Risks seldom amount to anything if one accepts them with a degree of caution.

I set out to locate Madame Hazel Guigane, who I had reason to believe could do me a little favor without trouble to herself and who, I knew, was trustworthy in many respects, though generally considered—and with justice—as one of the worst women in the city.

She sometimes referred to herself as "Queen of the Hop-Heads."

TO BE CONTINUED



UNION IS STRENGTH

By F. ST. MARS

Author of "Haunters of the Heights," "Chivalry of the Wild," etc.

EVEN in the faint light given off by the moonbeams it could be seen that the vast forest floor was bare—nothing but a hall of a thousand mighty, buttressed columns, shooting up almost out of sight to that wonderful overworld of the forest roof, where rain and vegetation, bird and insect, and light and, it might almost be said, life itself, have their existence alone. Beneath, upon the spongy soil of ages almost nothing could grow because of the lack of light, and almost all the world was in the tree-tops, the tree-tops joined together by rope bridges of vines, by lichen and tree fern, and a very forest in itself, whose feet had never touched the ground for miles.

The ocelot, that most beautiful of all the cats, a study in marbled black satins, gray silks and cream velvet, whose grace exceeded even the wondrous grace of the leopard, could climb with an agility and ease almost bird-like, and in his treecraft was as perfect as the otter in streamcraft. But throughout that night all the perfection to which Nature had brought him through eons of carefully selected ancestors had not won him a meal.

The ocelot had climbed, and hidden, and waited, and climbed, and hidden, and stalked, and waited again—all to no purpose.

He had with smoldering eyes watched in silence the sloth swinging along, hung upside down beneath; but the leap was too long. If he missed, no power on earth could have saved the ocelot.

Once, with almost bursting, suppressed excitement, he had slid inch by inch toward a lesser ant-eater, only to be held at bay and forced, not willingly but spitting, to retreat along the vine-rope he was on, by a cohort of virulent ants in polished black armor.

The ocelot stopped and snarled. He was over four feet long, not counting his fifteen-inch tail, which he lashed; he was more used to dealing out terror and death than to being played the fool with in this annoying fashion. Moreover, his temper was short at the best of times, and just now the shorter because he was driven by an imperious necessity to find food for his mate as well as himself.

Madame Ocelot was in a difficulty. With a thriving family to suckle, she had taken a hurt in dealing with, or trying to deal with, a lesser ant-eater, who had dealt her a claw-cut in the soft pad of her right forefoot. Those claws put an end to Mrs. Ocelot's hunting for a week.

Wherefore we find the ocelot hunting for the whole family. Not that cat husbands of any kind, from "puss" to tiger, are addicted to looking after their wives very well, or at all, as a rule; but there are exceptions—mostly old males—that prove the rule, and this ocelot was one of the exceptions.

THE miniature, funny, wild pig whose name was peccary, nosing about for cassia-nuts in the hollow, vaulted dark, had learned that "union is strength," and that "good combination" is

double strength. Therefore she had never left the herd in all her life since one awful early day when, straying devious in a mocca-mocca thicket, she had been set upon by a jaguar. She carried the scars of that introduction to this day.

Just as she had never deserted the herd, the herd had never deserted her. It was a hundred strong, that herd, but in spite of its only tiny tusks it was, by reason of its united confidence and ferocity, a terrible proposition for any beast to face. Thus the little peccary had enjoyed impregnability against her foes. Now, however, tonight she was compelled to leave the herd, for she had little ones to look after. The little peccary slipped away unseen, unnoted.

The ocelot, turning his head slowly from staring upward in the direction of a howling monkey and wondering whether it would be worth the trouble to climb up the hundred and a half feet or so of branchless tree-trunk to where he was hiding and howling among the interlaced boughs of the top, saw suddenly, as it were, the passing of a smoke-like wraith—the little peccary.

And the ocelot was still.

Dappled silver in the dappled silver moonlight, he was as nearly invisible as it is possible for a plainly visible thing to be—and still trick the eye.

Anyway the smoke-wraith thing, if it were a thing and alive at all, did not see him. And the ocelot *did* keep still; few stones could have moved less.

For three minutes nothing happened—and they seemed like three hours.

Then one became aware that something had moved. The dappled silver moonlight was dappled silver moonlight only; the ocelot was no longer part of it, but had gone.

Then a pair of eyes appeared—the ocelot's eyes, pale, circular disks of green film, floating among the mighty iron-hard trunks in the darkness. And those eyes were alight; there was a smoldering fire at the back of them.

FROM the human point of view the ocelot's nose may have been very wonderful, but not from Nature's. It did not lead him to be absolutely sure what the smoke-wraith thing was, so that for all his stealth and care when he approached the sickly clump of stems of the ground-plant into which the wraith had vanished, he was none too sure whether he was stalking a reality or a fantom. But he was hungry.

Behind a forest giant, however, a mora-tree, slain by the gorgeous-blossomed "bush ropes," whose python-like coils the tree had partially broken down in its fall, formed a mound smothered in bush-like mammoth mistletoe, and here at last the ocelot knew the truth. The peccary had squeezed in here. The stems, by the taint upon them, said so. It was like having one's name pasted up outside one's bedroom door; but the name was very faintly written—anyway for the ocelot, who had to sniff about for some time before he felt anything like certain.

Where the small wild pig had squeezed in it is to be presumed that the ocelot could follow. The question was—would he? And after one prolonged stare he decided that he would not.

Peccaries' tusks are only very small—mere miniatures in the tusk line; but peccaries' courage is also very large, and cats, even big, hungry ocelots, do not believe in risking a hurt in obtaining a meal, if it can be avoided.

The ocelot therefore faded out as a figure fades on the screen at a picture show and was no more seen till his eyes—only his eyes and nothing else—appeared upon the top of the mighty mora-trunk, floating down it. From time to time those balls of slow green fire paused to peer down through the host of orchids and epiphytes, which smothered the fallen monarch of the forest.

Then suddenly the eyes became still, with a deadly fixed stare; a haze, almost as of smoke, passed across them momentarily, and the ocelot dropped off the trunk like a stone.

What followed was hectic.

The big cat had fallen upon the peccary. Cat-like, the ocelot had commandeered unto himself the initial advantage of complete surprize. There was no warning, nothing; just that lithe, armed beast dropping deadly out of the stillness and the dark.

Once launched, however, the actions of the ocelot were as terribly lightning-like and furious as they had been cautious and slow before. He seemed to have gone mad. He tore, with all great claws unsheathed

to their fullest; he bit, he wrenched with inconceivable fury.

In a second, almost, the peccary's head ought to have been in ribbons; but it was the head of a pig—that is to say, thick-skinned—and in spite of the ocelot's fury, though scarred, she had fought her foe off in a minute with wonderful courage.

But it could not last. She knew that her chance was a small one. The marbled fiend atop of her had rolled clear, and in the ghastly, frenzied tangle that ensued, both had somehow scrambled to their feet. In a flash the clever peccary was slashing, with that dogged, deadly stubbornness peculiar to pigs, at all and everything, and some of her slashes caught the smoked, tawny and marbled satin coat of her foe.

The little tusks ripped the folded, loose skin like razors, and the ocelot, with his tribal sensitiveness to pain, and with a perfect explosion of snarls, leaped away—temporarily. He was in again like a streak of light, more terrifyingly than ever, but he raged upon a peccary that was not there.

Not herself, it may be, or more clever than any almost but a pig could be, the peccary, once released from those awful claws, had charged straight away through the crowded tangle of vegetation, on, out into the open forest; on and on, straight as an aimed bolt to the river—away, and taking the ocelot away from her young.

Just as she burst, like a living shell, through the curtain of dense foliage that screened the river-bank, the ocelot, going like the wind, and wild with the thought of losing his prey, caught her up, sprang and clutched, and the two shot out into the moonlight, bound and locked together, into the open above the placid waters, and fell headlong in. As she fell, the peccary squealed, and as she squealed the river-bank all up and down rustled to the combined rush of a hundred little bodies. The ocelot turned as he swam, and saw the light and shade along the bank fill with a dozen restless, grunting shapes.

The peccary turned as she swam, too, and made straight toward those shapes. The ocelot did not; nor toward her. He knew she had called the herd and the herd had come, and he knew they would cut him to pieces if they got at him. He tacked about therefore, and made for the opposite bank at top speed; and even as he did so a dead, but still warm, scarlet-and-blue macaw, floating down-stream, hit him.

He knew not who had done the fell deed—perhaps one of the coatimundis, perhaps a savage old howler monkey; and he liked to eat his own kills, personally. Still, his wife wanted meat; here was meat, and it would save him the trouble of getting other; besides she would never know. He grabbed the macaw therefore, and vanished into the night.

THE LOST CHEROKEES

by Hugh Pendexter

AMONG the Cherokee legends is one dealing with a portion of the nation which lost itself in the West because of the sale of Cherokee lands to the whites in 1721. The story was held to be a fact by the Cherokee, who insisted that travelers returning from the Far West brought word of a tribe living at the base of the Rocky Mountains that spoke the Cherokee language and lived after the Cherokee fashion. Sequoya, who invented the Cherokee alphabet and lifted his people to a literary plane, when more than seventy years old became absorbed with the legend and at last traveled west, crossed the Mississippi and penetrated into Mexico in search of his lost people. He lost his life in the Mexican Sierras, near San Fernando, the late Summer of 1843. These legends of lost peoples are common among many tribes. The Kiowa version has it that years ago one of the chiefs quarreled over a division of game and took some of his people over the Rocky Mountains, near the British border, where somewhere they may be found, retaining the Kiowa language and customs. The Tonkawa believe a band of their people were cut off from the tribe by a tidal wave on the Texas coast and fled back to Mexico. The Tuscarora have a story of the tribe being separated by the Mississippi, the western band remaining in the plains and becoming the enemy of the eastern band.

HIGH EXPLOSIVES

by JESSE O. WHITEHEAD *and* WM. E. SMITH

A SHOOTER, as perhaps you know, is a familiar figure in the oil regions. His duties are to administer tonics to unhealthy oil wells which show signs of getting tired of furnishing oil and are beginning to show symptoms of decreased production.

The tonic consists of a liberal dose of nitro-glycerin, carefully lowered down the throat of the ailing well, after which every one leaves the potential danger zone except the shooter. His duty "remains to be did" and he does it with the nonchalance of a boy absorbing stolen watermelon. He goes over to the mouth of the well, carrying with him an iron weight, carefully spits about a pint of tobacco juice at the best target offering itself, drops the weight down the well and beats a hasty but orderly retreat.

According to the law of falling bodies, a weight dropping several thousand feet and landing upon a quantity of explosive possessing the unstable characteristics of nitro-glycerin is bound to cause something to happen. But what happens has nothing to do with the shooter. He has shot the well; it's up to Mother Nature, or whoever controls the destinies of oil wells, to do the rest.

So he climbs upon his wagon, generally a rickety-looking affair, with plenty of springs to provide for easy riding, starts his horse and with a red flag flapping over his load of latent destruction moves on to the next job. Speed does not interest him. Sometimes a misguided shooter attempts a burst of speed, which generally results in a burst of noise and a large hole in the roadway, no material being available even for burial purposes.

Therefore shooters seldom break the speed laws; they find that speed is not conducive to long life and therefore take their time. Furthermore, a shooter is king of the road; travelers breathe lightly as they pass him, and even the most blatant automobile rolls by with an air of meekness which would bring joy to the soul of the harassed city pedestrian, were he there to witness it.

SO WHEN, one crisp, cool morning in the late Springtime, two members of Colorado's State Constabulary force—this occurred before the "thirsty-first of July," when Colorado was a parched and dreary desert, while her sister State of Wyoming, to the north, was the nearest available oasis—saw a ramshackle old wagon, drawn by a horse in keeping therewith, and caught the crimson flash of a red flag, one of them remarked to his companion—

"Here comes a shooter."

To which the other replied:

"Yep; looks like old Bill Thompson. I can tell by the way he leans over to spit."

"You're right," agreed the other. "He's just about due along here on his regular trip."

And the approaching shooter, catching sight of the two officers, spouted a stream of tobacco juice at the nearest wheel hub, already stained a rich brown from many similar libations, and remarked to Spot, a wicked-

looking, dingy-gray bulldog, who occupied the other half of the seat:

"A feller can't go no place no more without runnin' into a bunch of some kind of cops. She's shore gittin' to be a —— of a country."

At which remark Spot wiggled an abbreviated tail by way of concurrence with his master's statement.

So old Bill slowly moved down the road from Cheyenne to Denver—a road which had been the scene of more than one wild race between whisky-runners and members of the State Constabulary—races which more often than not ended in wrecked cars and killed and wounded men.

For a quarter of a mile or more behind the shooter hung a cloud of dust, kicked up by the shuffling feet of the horse. And the entire outfit, horse, wagon, driver and dog, was heavily sprinkled with a layer of this same dust—grayish brown and as fine as talcum powder.

Bill himself was a weather-beaten looking individual, with a scraggly, brass-colored mustache and a week's growth of beard nearly the color of copper. Shrewd, steely-blue eyes, bright and restless, peered from beneath the battered old felt hat. The color of his clothing was indistinguishable beneath the all-enveloping coating of dust.

As he drew abreast of the two officers he stopped the horse and straightened up.

"Hello, boys," he greeted them. "How's the booze business this mornin'?"

The two officers arose from the running-board of their automobile, upon which they had been sitting, and approached Bill.

"Hello, Bill," responded one of them. "Where are you bound for this morning?"

"Headin' south," briefly answered Bill, removing his hat and using it to beat some of the dust from his clothing.

"What are you fellers doin' here?" he continued. "You ain't expectin' some little booze-runner to come along an' give you a drink, are you?"

He grinned at them.

"You can't never tell, Bill," answered the older of the two. "You know they do come along once in a while."

"I saw some feller in a flivver j'st a-burnin' up the road, headin' for Cheyenne," said Bill, "as I was comin' along back there a ways."

"Say, Morgan, we must have threw an awful scare into that old boy," said one of the officers, and they both laughed.

"How was that?" asked Bill, leaning forward.

"Me an' Johnson was just gettin' breakfast," stated Morgan, "an' all at once some guy in a flivver came driftin' down the road as fast as he could turn a wheel; we figured on stoppin' him, but he saw us first, an' he turned so quick that he nearly went clear over."

"Yes," added Johnson, "an' when I hopped into our old bus there an' tried to start her, the bleedin' motor back-fired, an' I guess, by the way that bird slid around the bend in the road, he thought we was shootin' at him."

"He was still travelin' on high when he passed me," stated Bill. "He'd druv that there pore little flivver till its tongue was hangin' out."

"Too bad," said Morgan.

"Yeah, ain't it," agreed Bill. "Well, boys, I guess I'd better be rollin' on; I can't afford to waste my val'able time talking to common cops."

And he gathered up the reins and picked up his whip, preparatory to setting his ancient steed in motion.

"When anybody comes along with a load like you carry," stated Johnson, "we ain't sorry to see him go."

"You wouldn't be int'rested in a sample o' my line of goods, I s'pose?" questioned Bill, and a wide grin showed a set of tobacco-stained teeth.

"No, sir," vehemently replied Morgan, "an' besides we ain't goin' to be a bit lonesome when we see you goin' down the road."

"You fellers ain't very p'lite, but I never saw a cop that was," Bill retorted. "J'st say the word, boys, an' I'll toss out a little——"

"Never mind, Bill," was the hasty interruption. "We wouldn't bother you that much."

The two hastily backed away.

"Oh, all right," sighed Bill, " but you've hurt my feelin's, an' I'm goin' to leave you all by yourselves."

And Bill finally persuaded the horse to wake up and move on.

"So long, boys," he called over his shoulder as he moved off. "I guess this'll be about my last trip for a while."

"Good luck, Bill," returned Morgan; and Johnson added—

"Be careful to go around the rocks, Bill."

"*Adios, hombres,*" returned Bill. "Get up, you ol' hay-burner," he remarked to the horse, with a fleck of his whip, and the horse, which had almost stopped again, once more got under way with a great churning up of dust.

"He's some character, ain't he?" said Morgan, watching Bill's progress down the road.

"He sure is, and I guess he makes money shootin' wells too," said Johnson thoughtfully, "but I wouldn't have that man's job for a dollar a minute."

"You an' me both," agreed Morgan. "That's one outdoor sport that ain't right healthy."

Thus they dismissed Bill from their thoughts, and for the next half-hour were busy about their car, making some minor adjustments and repairs—so busy in fact that only when Morgan happened to straighten up for a moment and idly look around did he notice the big black touring-car which had crept down the road toward them and was now barely a hundred feet away.

THE two men in the car, seeing they were observed and noting the officers' automobile by the roadside, immediately speeded up, and the car shot by in a perfect storm of dust and smoke.

Instantly both officers jumped into their car, but there was a short delay before their motor responded to Johnson's excited efforts to start it, and they turned into the road and gave chase to the fleeing car.

Straight down the road, unmindful of sand, ruts, bumps or anything save the fleeing automobile, Johnson drove at top speed. Suddenly one of the figures in the car ahead turned and an instant later Morgan heard a ripping sound behind him. Looking back to ascertain the cause, he saw a long, irregular gash in the upholstering of the tonneau. An instant later he ducked as the vicious whine of another bullet could be heard above the roar of the motor.

"They must have the goods," he remarked to Johnson, who was driving "or, they wouldn't be trying to shoot us up."

"Looks that way to me," was the reply of Johnson, giving the wheel a twist as the car hit a bit of sandy road and skidded dangerously.

"Better shoot 'em up a little, Morgan, an' see what they think of it."

Morgan promptly brought his gun to bear and the automatic popped like a small machine gun, without, however, any effect upon the car ahead, or its occupants, except an increase in its speed.

"If we had a real car instead of this old bus," said Johnson, "we might be able to do something to these booze-pedlers besides throw a scare into 'em."

"It would help a lot. This old car couldn't even make it interesting for a turtle."

Morgan took another shot at the fugitives in order to relieve his ruffled feelings.

So the two cars roared madly on, the black touring-car gradually drawing away from the officers. Suddenly the car ahead raced around a curve in the road, and was out of sight for a few seconds. When the officers reached a spot where the fleeing car was again visible they saw far ahead a little dust cloud in the road.

"There's Bill," they both exclaimed at the same instant.

"I hope those fellows don't hit him," said Johnson.

"There'll be three new faces in heaven if they do," answered Morgan. "I'm afraid, though, that heaven'd be too quiet for Bill."

"Anyhow, if that car hits Bill somebody's goin' to get an awful surprize."

Both officers, with eyes fixed on the two conveyances, awaited the collision which seemed inevitable.

A few seconds later, when it was apparent that the fleeing automobile had overtaken the shooter, there was a swirl of dust which completely hid both the shooter's rig and the touring-car.

"He hit 'im!" exclaimed Johnson tensely under his breath.

The knuckles of Morgan's hands showed white, as he instinctively clenched his hands, awaiting the shock of the expected explosion.

None came, however, and as they cautiously approached the two now stationary vehicles they saw, through the dust which was rapidly drifting to windward under the influence of a slight breeze, old Bill's rickety wagon standing at an acute angle in the ditch at the side of the road and threatening to tip over at any moment.

Its red flag was idly flapping in the breeze

and Bill, who was wedged in between the shafts of his wagon and the rearmost portion of his horse, was using an apparently unlimited vocabulary of profane remarks, addressed to the occupants of the big touring-car, which remarks were apparently in no manner interfered with by reason of his rather uncomfortable position.

The horse was tentatively nibbling at a wisp of grass and Bill's dog was lying in the slender shade of a fence-post, seeming to be waiting for Bill to finish his remarks.

As to the two occupants of the automobile, which had evidently been thrown off the road by a deep rut, both were quietly sitting in their car, the driver with his hands resting on the steering-wheel. The other was wiping blood from his face, which was rather badly gashed. The car's wind-shield was shattered, the front axle bent and the head-lights twisted, giving the machine a curiously cross-eyed appearance.

Johnson stopped his machine and both alighted. Morgan approached the two men in the wrecked auto, carrying his gun in his hand, ready for an emergency. Johnson went to the assistance of Bill.

"You ain't hurt, are you, Bill?" he inquired.

"No, I ain't hurt," said Bill after directing a last scathing flow of profanity at the two liquor-runners, "but it ain't them or'nary whelps' fault that I ain't all blowed to ——."

"Lemme help you out," offered Johnson. "I guess you ain't hurt or you couldn't swear like that."

"I'm gifted thataway," stated Bill modestly, as with the officer's aid he untangled himself from his horse and dusted himself off.

Then, taking a greasy-looking plug of tobacco from his hip pocket, he bit off a huge chew, looked himself over, spat a couple of times and asserted:

"Guess I'm O. K. now. Let's go an' look 'em over."

And the two crossed the intervening space.

Morgan had in the mean time searched the two men and collected what weapons he found—a pair of ugly-looking revolvers—and was investigating the contents of the tonneau.

"They sure had a load," he remarked to Bill and Johnson, as they approached. "They're loaded to the guards with booze."

"Bill," solemnly said Johnson, "if they'd hit you, you'd sure gone somewhere in good spirits."

"Ain't it the truth?" agreed Bill with a cheerful grin. "But wouldn't it been a —— of a note if I'd been blowed off'n the map on my last trip? Wouldn't it now?"

"There wouldn't have been any funeral expenses anyhow," pointed out Morgan.

Bill made no reply.

MORGAN and Johnson now proceeded to examine the wrecked car, but it was obvious that it would not be moved without assistance from the nearest town, so they turned their attention to the men in the car.

"You guys are sure in bad," remarked Morgan. "Look at our car."

He pointed to the torn gash in the upholstering, marking the path of a bullet.

"You came awful near to gettin' one of us."

"You surely wouldn't have got us if it hadn't been for that —— shooter," retorted one in a surly tone. "I just got a glimpse of that red flag through the dust an' turned out to give him a wide berth an' hit that rut. If it hadn't been for that you never would have caught us."

"I guess that's right," agreed Johnson. "You sure have a peach of a car."

"She'll do eighty if you open her up," stated the driver. "I ain't never had the nerve to hold her wide open yet," he added.

"Well, let's get goin'," Morgan suggested. "You two fellers"—speaking to the liquor-runners—"get in the back of our car."

Which they accordingly did.

"Bill," turning to the shooter—"you sure were in the right spot at the right time; do you need any help to get goin' again?"

Bill squinted at his wagon.

"Nope," he announced. "I can git goin' all right."

"All right," was the response. "So long, old scout."

Both officers climbed into their car and proceeded down the road, with Morgan sitting where he could keep an eye upon the two prisoners.

"So long," said Bill.

He turned toward his wagon, grasped his horse's bridle and by careful maneuvering soon had his wagon back in the road.

He then climbed up, seated himself, whistled for his dog, who jumped up beside

him, cracked his whip over the horse's back, remarked, "Giddap, you ol' hay-burner," and was once more on his way.

Lying in the ditch, under a small shrub, where it had fallen from Bill's wagon, a bright tin can glistened in the sunshine. The rear wheel of the wagon had passed over it, causing its contents to leak out slowly and moisten the little patch of earth beneath. The can bore the label "Nitroglycerin," but the odor of its contents was that of Kentucky Bourbon.

THE GRAND CHAM

A Complete Novel by Harold Lamb

Author of "The Curved Sword," "The Village of the Ghost," etc.

I

THE GATE OF SHADOWS

IT WAS evening on the plain of Angora in the year of Our Lord 1394. The sun was a glimmering ball of red, peering through a haze of dust at the caravan of Bayezid the Great, surnamed the Thunderbolt, Sultan of the Osmanli and Seljuke Turks, master of the Caliphate and overlord of the Mamelukes of Egypt.

Bayezid reined in his white Arab.

"We will sleep the night here," he announced, "for this is an auspicious spot."

At Angora a decade ago, as leader of the hard-fighting Osmanlis, Bayezid had won his first pitched battle. He had been acclaimed sultan and straightway had slain his brother with his own hand. From that moment Fate had been kind to the man called the Thunderbolt.

"To hear is to obey," cried his followers. "Hail to the Mighty, the Merciful, the All-Dispensing One!"

Bayezid glanced around through the dust haze and saw the quivering shapes of silk pavilions rising from the baked clay floor of the plateau as his camp-followers scurried about. A line of grunting baggage-camels stalked into the nest of tents that marked the quarters of his grandees. Attended by negro slaves, the several litters of his women halted beside the khanates that separated his household from the small army that attended him.

A slow smile crossed his broad, swart face.

A powerful hand caressed the pearls at the throat of his tunic. Fate had indeed exalted him. He had been called the spiritual effigy of the formerly great khalifs of Damascus and Baghdad. He knew himself to be the supreme monarch of Asia, and in that age the courts of Asia were the rendezvous of the world.

True, on the outskirts of the sultan's empire, to the East, was Tamerlane the Tatar and his horde. But had not Tamerlane said that Bayezid, given the men to follow him, was the wisest of living generals?

As for Europe, Bayezid had advanced the border of his empire into Hungary; Constantinople, glittering with the last splendor of the Byzantines, was tottering; Venice and Genoa paid tribute for permission to use the trade routes into the Orient.

Bayezid glanced curiously at the group of Frankish (European) slaves whose duty it was to run beside his horse. They were panting, and sweat streaked the sand that coated their blackened faces. Fragments of cloth were wrapped about their bleeding feet.

Five of the six captives bent their heads in the salaam that had been taught them. The sixth remained erect, meeting the sultan's eye.

Bayezid half frowned at this boldness which broke the thread of his thoughts. His hand rested on the gold trappings of his splendid horse. To the side of this horse slaves were dragging a cloth of silver carpet that stretched to the opening of the imperial khanates.

This done, the hawk-faced Sheikh of Rum, through whose territory mid-way in Asia Minor the sultan's caravan had been journeying from Constantinople to Aleppo —the lord of Rum approached his master respectfully.

"O Light of the Faith," the old man observed gravely. "It is the hour of the *namaz gar*, the evening prayer."

"True." Bayezid started and his glance went once more to the white man who stared at him. "I will dismount. Bid yonder Frank kneel by my horse that I may step upon his back."

All around Bayezid the grandees were kneeling in their heavy robes upon clean prayer carpets, washing their hands and faces in fresh water brought by slaves from the springs that marked the site of the camp. The sheikh bowed and gave a curt command to the master of the slaves, El-Arjuk, a stalwart, white-capped Janissery, whip in hand.

"The body of the Frank will be honored by the foot of the Great, the Merciful."

At this the captive stepped forward before the Janissery could touch him. Bayezid reflected that the white man understood Turki, which was the case.

And then to the surprize of the onlookers, the captive folded his arms and shook his head.

"Kneel," hissed the sheikh. "Dog of a *caphar*—unbeliever——"

"I hear," said the captive. "I will not obey."

The Janissery reached for his whip and the old Moslem for his simitar. The sultan checked them, springing easily from his peaked saddle to the cloth of silver carpet. From his six feet of muscular height he looked down at the white man. His beaked nose seemed to curl into his bearded mouth and his black eyes snapped.

Then the sultan knelt, facing toward the southern sky-line beyond which was Mecca, and repeated the *Allah akbar* in his clear, deep voice. When the last of his followers had completed the evening worship Bayezid arose, his smile cold as the glitter of steel, his nervous fingers playing with the jeweled sword-hilt at his girdle. He noted the wide brown eyes of the captive who still stood quietly at his side, and with the interest of a born leader of men he scrutinized the square high shoulders, the long chin and the wide, delicate mouth upturned in a half-smile.

The man's face was burned by the sun to the hue of leather; his ragged tunic fell away from a heavily thewed pair of arms. His body had the lines of youth, but his eyes and mouth were hard with fatigue.

"You know my speech," observed the deep voice of the Thunderbolt. "And your eyes tell me that you are not mad. What is your name and rank?"

"Michael Bearn," responded the Christian.

"Mishael Bi-orn. Your rank?"

"None, my lord." The man's smile broadened slowly.

"In what army did you serve?"

"None, my lord."

The patrician sheikh, whose fathers had been warriors, spat upon the ground and assured his master the sultan that this dog and the other Franks had been taken when a

Christian galley was shipwrecked on the Anatolian shore a year ago. The Turks who took them had said that this dog was *khan* of the galley, that he was a *caphar* magician who steered his craft by a bedeviled needle that pointed always to the north.

"What is your country?" demanded Bayezid.

"I have no country. The sea is my home."

Michael Bearn had been born on the cliffs of Brittany. His mother, an Irish gentlewoman, had landed from his father's ship for the birth of the boy. When his father, a taciturn Breton, had died Michael had left his mother in a tower on the Brittany coast and had taken to the sea.

There had been talk of a crusade against the Turk who was master of the Holy Land. Michael's mother had pleaded with the boy to wait and join one of the bands of warrior-pilgrims to Rome. But Michael had no yearning for the cassocked priests. The sea called him and his father's blood urged him to strange coasts.

It was the way of women, he had told the Irish mother, in his young intolerance of belief, to seek comfort of priests and to covet the insignia of the cross. His mother had hid her tears and Michael did not know how he had hurt her.

Following the bent of that time, a few years had brought him to the Levant and the glamor of trade with the Orient. He had been master mariner of the galley wrecked on the Anatolian coast while it was being pursued by Turkish pirates.

"And so," mused Bayezid, "a slave without rank, without race and an unbeliever dares to disobey a command of mine? So be it. You have strength in your arms and pride. It pleases me to put both to the test."

It was part of the secret of the Thunderbolt's achievement that he enforced cruel discipline among his followers. Michael Bearn's eye lighted and he lifted his head.

"Set a simitar in my hand," he said quickly. "My lord, choose one of your skilled swordsmen and let him wear his mail. With a simitar—his weapon, not mine—I will stand against him in my shirt."

The stubborn pride of the Breton that had not let him prostrate himself under the foot of a Turk flared at the chance to strike a blow with a weapon. He had endured captivity doggedly, seeking for a chance to escape to the hills to the east where were tribesmen who did not owe allegiance to the sultan.

But he had not been willing to demean himself, to gain time for a further chance at liberty with his five comrades. Like all seamen of the age, he was experienced in the use of sword and mace.

A swift death was better than months of running beside the horse or litter of a Turkish master.

"Shall a dog be given a sword?" growled the aged sheikh, quenching Michael's new hope. This time Bayezid glanced at his follower approvingly.

"Bring this man," he ordered, "with the five *caphars*, his comrades, before my tent. Bring a sword, and"—he nodded thoughtfully—"the iron sleeve."

AT MENTION of this instrument of torture which broke the bones of a man's arm as easily as glass, the slaves who understood Bayezid's words shivered and stared at Michael. They followed, however, after the white cap of the swaggering Janissery, to see the torment inflicted.

The dark face of the Thunderbolt softened in pleasant expectancy as he knelt on a priceless carpet under the open portico of his tent and scanned the six Christians. He was accustomed to play with his victims. Disdaining further to address the captives openly, he whispered to the Sheikh of Rum, who stood in the half-circle of courtiers behind the sultan.

"Know, O ill-omened ones," translated the old Moslem in bastard Greek, "that your leader has offended against the Majesty, the Splendor. Torture will be the lot of your khan unless——"

With an eye to dramatic effect he paused, nodding to the master of the slaves who advanced from the group of watching Janisseries, a spear's cast away. The warrior carried a misshapen thing of iron resting on a wooden table. The rusty metal was formed in the semblance of a lion with an enormous mouth, lying prone on the table. Twin bars projected on either side from the ribs of the beast.

"—unless," resumed the sheikh, "one of you five *caphars* will offer to fight in defense of the body of your friend."

Michael Bearn looked up quickly, intending to warn his mates not to accept the proffer of the Moslems. But they did not meet his eye. They were Portuguese and Italians, wasted by sickness and misery.

"It is not fitting, verily," the spokesman went on, interpreting the low words of Bayezid, "that a good weapon should be given to the hand of one who is accursed. Yet a lion may slay a dog, and the sight of an infidel's blood is a blessing to a true believer. So, one of you may take up the quarrel of your comrade and fight with swords against one of the champions of the Janisseries. Whether your champion conquers or not, the man named Bearn will be spared the torture."

Whereupon the sheikh drew his own simitar and held out its hilt.

Michael Bearn would have taken it, but the wily Moslem shook his head.

"Not you," he explained in Arabic. "The Most Wise will presently make a test of your strength. Now he tries out the Christian hearts of your comrades."

As none of the others volunteered for the duel, the sultan made a further concession. The man who offered to fight would be set free—if he lived—with Bearn.

But the five men would not hazard their lives on a chance of liberty. They cast sidelong glances at the glittering simitar and at a stalwart warrior who stood forth from the guards, his shield dressed ready for the conflict.

It gave keen pleasure to Bayezid to see these men refuse the issue. He smiled to think that they clung to the ignoble life of slavery. His own men were trained to value their lives lightly in battle and to die for their faith.

It pleased Bayezid, also, to deny Bearn the chance of the fight, for he knew that the young seaman would have welcomed it.

"So be it," he nodded. "The torture."

The expectant master of the slaves summoned the waiting warrior and set the table before Michael Bearn.

"Hold forth your arm," he commanded.

Michael paled and set his lips as he extended his left hand.

"The right one," objected Bayezid, following all that passed with the eye of a connoisseur.

A moment later Michael's right arm had been thrust up to the elbow into the iron gullet of the lion and strapped into place. The Breton stiffened as he felt the cold touch of the vise, concealed within the form of the lion, grip his bare forearm. Bayezid nodded, leaning back on his pillows, under the sweep of a peacock fan in the hands of a slave.

The two Janisseries threw their weight on the projecting levers and there came to the ears of the spectators a dull *crack* as if an arrow had been snapped in half.

But Michael did not cry out. Sweat started on his face and blood dripped from his lip where his teeth had set upon it. This did not suit Bayezid, who had expected screams and a prayer for mercy.

"Again," he snarled.

The two torturers altered the position of Michael's broken arm slightly and clamped the levers into place a second time.

This time Michael groaned softly and swayed on his feet, sinking to his knees.

"Now the *caphar's* pride is broken because his strength has passed from him," thought Bayezid, watching keenly. To the attentive sheikh he whispered:

"The broken ends of the bone of the arm have been ground together and he will whine for mercy—like the other dogs who have no stomach for pain."

The Janisseries released Michael's arm from the instrument of torture at a glance from the sultan. On the back of the forearm the skin had been broken by a bloodied fragment of bone.

Supporting himself by his left hand on the table, Michael rose slowly to his feet, wincing and setting his lips as he did so. His eyes were dark with agony as they sought Bayezid's face.

The youthful pride and humor had vanished from Michael's countenance, leaving a grim mask of purpose. The abundant vitality of his powerful body had been sapped by the ordeal. But there was a new vigor in his poise, the strength of an unalterable determination.

So the captive faced his tormentor.

"I shall not forget this, my lord sultan." He indicated his maimed limb. "I shall be avenged—" His voice choked.

The Sheikh of Rum who had been studying the eyes of the injured man now drew his weapon again and salaamed before Bayezid.

"O Most Wise, it would be best to slay this one. An injured snake is quick to strike."

The Thunderbolt shook his head coldly. He had not yet tasted the delight of the torture to the fullest.

"Nay. I would watch the *caphar* run beside my litter on the morrow, and see how he bears his pain."

The Sheikh of Rum was very wise.

IT WAS a week later that the six captives made their attempt to escape from the caravan of the Osmanli. During the week they had been ascending to the cooler plateau of Lake Van, where the summits of the Caucasus were visible far to the north.

Yet it was to the east that the six had decided to flee. They had seen that the outriders of the Turks who pillaged supplies in the villages of lesser Armenia had kept a vigilant outlook in that direction.

To the east lay a pass called the Gate of Shadows, leading into the lands of Tatary. Michael and his mates did not then know why the Turks shunned this pass. But they believed that once in the Gate of Shadows they would be safe from pursuit owing to this superstition of the Turks.

The night on which they made their venture was clear. The stars shone brilliantly through the colder air of the height by the lake. Men and beasts of the caravan were weary after a long march. Bayezid was never sparing of his followers.

Two things had decided the Christians upon this night. They were at the point of the march from Constantinople to Aleppo, which was nearest the Gate of Shadows. And the Moslems had fasted for three days. That night was the feast of Miriam when the long fast was broken and warriors and courtiers alike satiated themselves with meat and wine.

Bayezid, although calling himself head of the faith, always allowed his men their fill of debauchery, knowing that it drew soldiers to his ranks.

Consequently the Janisseries who watched the *aul* where the Christian captives were kept apart from the slaves of other races were a little drunk and more than a little sleepy.

Michael, by tacit consent, had been chosen the leader of the six. Memory of the torture to which he had been subjected had made the Portuguese and Italians eager to flee. Cowards at heart, the nearer peril of the "iron sleeve" made them willing to risk the death that was penalty for an attempt to flee their bondage.

And Michael, who yearned for the freedom that would afford him a chance to strike back at Bayezid, had formed a plan readily.

The *aul* was a rough square shelter of rocks resembling very much a large hut without a roof. The stone walls were as high as a man. The two yawning spearmen who acted as guards had built a fire just within the entrance.

As usual the prisoners gobbled down the evil-tasting *pilau*—broth of rotting sheep's flesh—that was set before them in a kettle. The evening prayers of the Moslems had been completed long since and soft radiance coming from the silk pavilions of the nobles indicated that the feast was well along.

A heavy guard of wakeful Mamelukes stood about the enclosure where Bayezid was quartered and other mounted sentries paced about the circuit of the fires around which warriors and slaves alike drank, sang and slept.

It was the first watch of the night when one of the Portuguese rose and tossed a double armful of dried tamarisk branches on the fire that had sunk to embers. A crackling blaze climbed skyward barely three paces inside the *aul* entrance.

For a moment the interior of the walled space would be concealed from the glance of passers-by. One of the Janisseries growled and spat, motioning the Portuguese back to his place. The other sentry leaned on his battle-ax half-asleep.

Making signs that he wished to communicate something, the captive moved nearer the first sentry, while one of the Italians arose stealthily and keeping within the large shadow cast by the three men near the fire, slipped to the rear of the Janissery.

Michael appeared to be asleep. In spite of his crippled arm—the bones had been rudely set by a *hakim* of the sheikh who, in obedience to the pleasure of his master, intended Michael to live—in spite of his weakness and the fever that had set upon him for several days, the guards always kept vigilant watch upon him, knowing that the Breton was more dangerous than his mates.

Through his half-closed eyes Michael could see the Italian detach a stone from the top of the wall behind the three men silently. The arms of the captives had been left free,

although their ankles were secured at night by heavy leather thongs that would not yield to their fingers. Naturally none of them had a weapon of any kind.

The sentries had no reason to expect an attempt to escape. Even if the two Janisseries could be disposed of, the captives would have to pass through the camp and pierce the cordon of riders in the outer darkness in order to gain the plain.

Even clear of the camp they would be pursued by well-mounted warriors and the odds against them in a hostile country were very great.

The first sentry was staring mockingly at the Portuguese who cringed beside him, gesturing futilely. And then the Italian cast his heavy stone with both arms.

It struck the Janissery at the base of the skull and pitched him forward a dozen feet. He fell, stunned, with his face within the edge of the fire.

The second warrior started out of his doze and his lips parted for a cry. But the Portuguese, frenzied by peril and hope of escape, clutched his throat. The Italian had leaped after the stone and caught up the spear of the man he had slain.

This spear he thrust into the clothing over the stomach of the choking sentry.

"Harken." Michael had run to them and addressed the struggling Moslem. "Be silent and do as I bid ye or your body will lie in the fire."

A stringent odor of burning flesh and cloth came to the nostrils of the sentry and he ceased struggling, waiting for the blow that would slay him. But Michael with his left arm dragged the smoking corpse from the flames and swiftly directed two of his men to conceal it under some of their robes in a corner. Before doing so, he saw that they took a dagger and simitar from the dead Janissery and stowed the weapons under their own clothing.

"Now," Michael commanded the watching sentry, "your life will be spared if you do this; call twice for El-Arjuk, master of the slaves who is in command of the *aul* this night. He gorges himself at a near-by fire. Do not cry for aid, but call his name."

The man winced as the spear in the hands of the Italian pricked his belly. He did not believe that he would be permitted to live, yet he had smelled the burning flesh of his comrade.

"El-Arjuk!" He lifted a long, wailing cry while Michael listened closely. "Ohai—El-Arjuk!"

"Again," whispered the Breton and the call for the master of the slaves was repeated.

This time a harsh voice made answer. Michael's eyes narrowed and he ordered the fidgeting captives back to their sleeping-robes with the exception of one man who stood against the wall, drawing the sentry back with him and pressing a dagger's point from behind into his flesh.

Michael caught up the long battle-ax that had supported the Janissery in his ill-timed doze. He hefted it in his left hand, found its length unwieldy, and broke the wooden shaft in two under his foot.

Taking up the shortened weapon, he held it close to his side, away from the fire.

"Keep back," he hissed at the others, "for this is my fight."

They mumbled and straightway fell to staring in fear as a burly form strode through the entrance of the *aul* and came around the diminishing blaze of the fire.

"Who called?" growled El-Arjuk, glancing at Michael and the one sentry swiftly.

He was flushed from drinking, although his step was steady. In feasting he had laid aside his armor, but held a small target of bull's hide and a simitar. Noticing the absence of the other Janissery and the strange quietude of the one sentry, he started.

"Blood of Sheitan——"

"I summoned you," said Michael grimly. "To your reckoning. Guard yourself!"

With that he leaped, swinging his haft of the battle-ax. With one motion El-Arjuk flung up his shield and slashed forward under it with his sword.

The blade met nothing but air. Michael's jump had carried him over the low sweep of the Turk's simitar, while the hastily raised target momentarily obstructed the vision of his adversary.

The Breton's broad chest struck the shield, bearing it down, and his shortened ax fell once, the full weight of his powerful body behind it. El-Arjuk had started to cry for aid when the blade of the ax crashed into his forehead and the cry ended in a quavering groan. Michael fell to the sand with his enemy, but he rose alone, listening intently.

From somewhere outside the *aul* a question was shouted idly, for the thud of the

two bodies and the moan of the master of the slaves had been heard.

"Reply," snarled Michael at the staring Janissery who was going through the motions of ablution, kneeling in the sand. The Moslem wished to die with this rite performed. "Reply with the words I put into your mouth or we will fill your throat with the unclean flesh of the dead."

The warrior hesitated, then bowed his head.

"It is naught," he called back over the stone wall as Michael prompted him, "but the death of a dog, upon whom be the curse of Allah for his sins."

A satisfied laugh from the listeners without, who believed that a Christian slave had been killed, came to the ears of the captives. Wasting no time, Michael had green tamarisk branches cast on the fire causing smoke to fill the *aul* entrance.

Behind this makeshift curtain he ordered El-Arjuk stripped of his brilliant yellow coat and insignia and instructed the nervous captives how to rewind the white turban so as to conceal the blotches of blood.

This done, the Portuguese who was like the master of the slaves in build was clad in the garments and given the shield and simitar. Meanwhile the excited men would have slain the stolid sentry had not Michael intervened.

"I made a pledge," he said coldly. "You want blood, methinks, and you will find plenty before long."

So the surprized sentry was bound and wrapped around with the clothing of the Portuguese until he was helpless either to move or cry out. Then, with the two bodies, he was laid in a corner of the enclosure and covered with sheepskin robes.

"Say to Bayezid," smiled Michael, "that I bid him not farewell—for I shall seek him again."

When the fire died down presently and passing soldiers glanced idly into the *aul*, a group of men issued forth without torches. At their head was the familiar uniform of the master of the slaves, and their feet were bound with leather thongs, permitting them to walk only slowly.

It was entirely natural that El-Arjuk should have work for the *caphar* slaves to do that night, so the revelers paid scant heed to the group. It was whispered, moreover, that one of the infidels had been slain, so it was entirely to be expected that the others would be used to dig a grave.

At the outskirts of the tents where darkness concealed them Michael called a halt. Passing near the fires, the garments of El-Arjuk had been their safeguard; in the dark they would be challenged at once by the mounted riders who patroled the camp.

So Michael waited, kneeling on the ground in order to raise passing figures on the sky-line. He ordered his comrades to cut off with the weapons they had concealed under their clothes their bonds and to carry the cords until they could be concealed at a distance from the camp. Not until he was satisfied that a patrol of horsemen had passed the ridge in front of him did he give the word to advance.

An hour later they were beyond the outer guards and running due east, under the stars that guided them, toward the Gate of Shadows.

ON THE second night they took their ease. Michael had gone among the hill villages at twilight. He had worn the dress of El-Arjuk and when he returned to the men waiting in the thicket up the mountain-slope he said:

"The *Darband-i-Ghil*, the Spirit Gate, lies six hours' march above us. Come."

The six had run before now—too swiftly at first for long endurance—by the north shore of Van. Michael had steadied them to a slow trot and had taken pains to pass through such rocky ravines as offered, in order to wipe out traces of their passage. They had seen no pursuers, even after leaving the lake.

"Nay," growled a Genoese. "*Par Dex*, our bones ache and our feet bleed. We must sleep."

"Sleep!" cried Michael. "With Mamelukes riding in our tracks who have orders not to return alive without us. I'm thinking that Bayezid made short work of the Janissery guard whose life we spared. Will his horsemen yearn for a like fate?"

He himself was near the point of exhaustion, for his arm was scarcely knit and fever had weakened him. But the men would not move from the spot where they had been watching the lights of the Kurd village and talking among themselves.

Realizing that they must rest, Michael sat down against a tree for a brief sleep. The half-light of dawn was flooding the thicket and the sky over the black hills to

the east was crimson when he woke at the sound of approaching footsteps.

It was his own band and they were coming up from the village. Some of them were reeling, though not from fatigue, and their breath was heavy with olives and wine. They looked back over their shoulders and grinned uneasily when they met his eye.

"We've taken the Moors' food," boasted one fellow. "It's their own law, methinks. An eye for an eye. They'll remember us."

Michael glared. These were common men, very different from the belted knights who had sometimes visited his mother's home in Brittany. She had hoped that he would be a knight. Instead, he had led a rough life and had toiled against hardships until—this.

"——, what fools! That was a Kurdish village, and the men have good eyes and horseflesh. Well, I must bide with you, for you have named me leader. Come."

They ran sturdily through the dawn. Months of trotting beside the nobles of the Osmanli had schooled them to this. By midday they were above the fields in a place of gray rocks and red clay. In front of them a half-dozen bowshots away a great gully between mountain-shoulders showed the blue of the sky.

"The Gate of Shadows," they cried.

And with the words riders came out of the woods behind them.

Michael measured the distance to the gully, glanced back at the shouting Mamelukes, and shook his head. He pointed to a mound of rocks near by and led his five men there.

" 'Tis the gate of heaven you will see," he grunted. "No other, and not that, if you can not die like Christians."

And the five, to give them their due, fought desperately, using the few weapons they had carried from the Turkish camp, and eking these out with stones.

The Mamelukes, reenforced by Kurds from the hill village, tried at first to make them yield themselves prisoners. But the captives knew what manner of death awaited tham at Bayezid's tent and hurled their stones. The big Portuguese went down with an arrow in his throat. The Genoese leaped among the horses, knife in hand, and struggled weakly even when his skull was split with a mace.

The rearing horses stirred up a cloud of dust that covered the mound. Into this cloud Michael strode, swinging his half-ax. The first rider that met him was dragged from saddle and slain. Michael went down with a Mameluke on top of him and neither rose, for Michael's left hand had sought and found the other's dagger in his girdle.

When the last Christian had been shot down with arrows, the Turks dismounted and proceeded to pound the skulls and vital parts of the bodies of their victims with rocks. If any of the men of El-Arjuk had been in the party Michael would have suffered the fate of his comrades.

But the Mamelukes had neglected to give him the *coup de grâce* owing to the body of their warrior that lay upon his. When they lifted up their dead they saw only a prostrate Frank besmeared with blood—not his own—and with a swollen, bruised right arm that looked as if it had been crushed with a stone.

The senses had been battered out of Michael by the mace of the dead Mameluke and it was a fortunate thing for him. Because by the time he crawled to his feet there were no Turks within view.

Instead, black-winged birds casting a foul scent in the air hovered over his head. The vultures had been descending on the bodies of the five men when Michael Bearn stood up.

Now they circled slowly in the air or perched on the rocks near by patiently. Michael looked at them long, and then at the bodies of his comrades.

The five had not been brave men, but they had died bravely.

Michael walked slowly away from the knoll toward a rivulet issuing between rocks in the mountainside that rose mightily above him. He knelt and drank deeply. Then he dipped his head in the stream, wiping sway the dried blood. The flapping wings of the vultures impelled him to look up.

His glance penetrated straight down the ravine that was called the Gate of Shadows and he studied thoughtfully the vista of brown plain that lay beyond. Once within the pass he knew that he would see no more of the Turks. The evening before he had been told when he visited the Kurd village that the rock plateau in front of the pass had been the scene of a massacre by the Turks.

The skeletons of the dead were in the pass and a superstition had arisen that the souls

of the slain had not left the place. The voices of *ghils* had been heard in the darkness. So the Moslems considered the place not only unclean but accursed.

" 'Fore God," he sighed, "we were at the Gate, the very Gate. Well, here must they wait for me—my five mates that were."

So saying, he went back to the knoll, driving away the birds, and dug with his battle-ax a broad shallow grave in the loose sand. Dragging the bodies into this with his one useful arm, he covered them up first with sand, then with large rocks that he rolled down with his bare feet from the knoll.

FROM a wisp-like tamarisk thicket clinging between the boulders of the plateau, he cut two stout staffs with his ax. These he bound roughly together at the middle with a strip of leather cut from his jerkin. The longer staff of the two he imbedded in the sand at the head of the grave.

He had fashioned a cross.

"Rest ye," he said gravely and extended his left arm over his head. "*Vindica eos, Domine.*"

Now as he said this he glanced again at the ravine and the plain beyond where he could find food and a tent among the Tatar villages. Then he turned to the northwest where beyond the hills lay the Mormaior, or Black Sea, and beyond there the great cities of Europe.

To the northwest, if he could penetrate thither, were his countrymen, and theirs, he thought, was the power that might some day strike at the Thunderbolt.

It was to the northwest that he began to walk, away from the grave and the Gate of Shadows. Greater than the will to live was the will to seek again the man who had crippled him.

When darkness came and covered his movements he pressed forward more rapidly, swinging his short ax in his left hand. As he went he munched dates and olives that he had plucked from trees near the mountain villages. He found no men to accost him in these orchards, for the fields were scarred by hoofs of many horses and the huts were charred walls of clay.

Bayezid's riders had been pillaging the villages of Lesser Armenia.

Once, walking barefoot, he came upon a young wild sheep and killed it with his thrown ax. By now the villages had been left behind and below and the moon stared at him steadily from above the pillars of huge pines as he entered the forest-belt.

Another thought came to Michael. He remembered that, in the tower of ill-fitting stones on the sea cliffs of Brittany where the grass was short because of the ceaseless winds, a black-haired women waited, sitting by her weaving. He had vowed that he would come back to sit at his mother's table and tell of the voyages to the East. And this, she would know, he would do. A lawless boy, with his father's hot blood in him, he always kept his word.

From time to time he was forced to beat off the attacks of wild dogs with his ax as he worked through the passes of the Caucasian foothills. His bloodshot eyes closed to slits under the lash of the cold wind and he swayed as his heavily thewed limbs carried him down toward the place where he had seen a glimmer of water in the distance.

It was bodily weakness that drew his thoughts home to the tower and the coast where he had played as a child. For a space he forgot Bayezid and the torture. He had been hale and strong as a boy. Was he to go through life a cripple? Was that the will of God of which his mother had spoken, saying—

"The ways of God are beyond our knowing."

Thirst had been his invisible companion and the water-courses that he crossed were dry. They led him down to a plain of gray rocks and white salt, where the salt particles in the air dried up the moisture in his throat and brought blood to his lips.

The smell of water coming toward him from the wide shore fired him with longing. He went forward in a staggering run and knelt to dash up some of the water in his hand.

It was thick with salt and dull green in color.

"The Sarai Sea," he reflected, "the sea of salt. Eh, a rare jest to a thirsty man."

He knew then that he had come out on the border of the sea now called the Caspian and not the Mormaior (Black) Sea. But, rising, he saw some dull-faced Karabagh fishermen staring at him from a skiff in an adjoining inlet and he laughed exultantly, lifting his hand to the sunset in the west.

The skiff would fetch him to a Muscovite trading-galley, and in time Astrakan, then Constantinople. He had heard at the court of Bayezid that the Franks were

mustering a crusade, to assemble at that city. The chivalry of Europe was taking up arms against the Turk.

"There will be a battle," he whispered to himself, "and I shall have a share in it, God willing."

II

THE RIVER OF DEATH

ANOTHER sunset, and a war galleass was feeling its way with a double bank of oars against the sluggish current of a broad river. There was no wind and the heavy red pennon emblazoned with a winged lion hung nearly to the water between the steering-oars of the high stern castle.

The dark figures of men-at-arms pressed close to the rail of the benches that ran along each side of the waist of the vessel, above the moving gray shapes that were the rowers' backs.

"Give way, to the shore," called a voice from the stern platform.

As the heavy-timbered galleass drew in, fully manned for action, toward the rushes of the bank, the speaker cupped his left hand to his eyes and stared at the ruddy light of countless fires. His right arm hung stiffly at his side.

A year had not availed to restore the use of his injured arm to the man who had been a Turk's slave. Now by infinite pains he could manage with his left. Unlike the men-at-arms and the mailed Venetian archers clustered upon the stern, he wore no weapon.

Michael Bearn had reached the Venetian fleet in the Black Sea at an opportune moment. Experienced ship-masters were needed to take command of the new galleys that were to cooperate under the Venetian flag with the Christian army on the mainland.

The body of the Venetian fleet lay off the mouth of the Danube, waiting to convey the victorious army of the Christian Allies to Asia Minor and Jerusalem.

It was a great array that had come against the Ottoman. Besides the Venetian war-craft, Sigismund of Hungary was up the river and the cohorts of Slavs, Magyars and the Serbs. With these were the pick of the chivalry of France, the forces of the Elector Palatine and the Knights of Saint John.

They had struck down through the mountains of the Serbs and besieged Nicopolis, on the river. Warnings of the approach of the conqueror Bayezid had reached them, and the French knights who had brought shiploads of women and wine down the Danube had laughed, saying that if the sky were to fall, they would hold it up with their spears.

Verily it was a goodly array of Christendom before Nicopolis—an army blessed by the Pope and dispatched against the Ottoman, who had swept over Arabia, Egypt, Asia Minor—far into Greece, now impotent, and the rugged mainland behind Constantinople.

The Moslems held Gallipoli and a *khadi* held court beside the marble and gold palace of Palealogus. Bayezid the Conqueror, surnamed the Thunderbolt, had never met defeat.

Bayezid had advanced to the relief of the Moslem governor of Nicopolis and Emperor Sigismund and Count Nevers, commander of the French, had given battle.

For days, hearing of the coming struggle, Michael Bearn had chafed upon the narrow after-deck of his galleass. He had urged the Venetian commander to make his way up the river, to assist in the struggle if possible.

Bearn had been told by the *provveditore* that the fleet of the Signory of Venice had promised to convey the army only to Asia Minor. It was not the policy of the Maritime Council to risk the loss of good ships—but Bearn was allowed to go, to bring news.

It had been a dangerous path up the Danube, for small Turkish craft thronged the shore and bodies of Janisseries were to be seen from time to time in openings in the dense forests.

Now, conning the darkened galleass close to the bank, Michael Bearn strained his ears to read the meaning of the tumult on shore. He could see horsemen riding past the glow of burning huts and the clash of weapons drifted out over the quiet waters.

"Sigismund pursues the Saracen!" exulted a man among the archers on deck.

Wild hope leaped into the heart of Michael Bearn. Was the issue of the battle so soon decided? Had the armed chivalry of France outmatched the power and skill of Bayezid? He yearned for the first glimpse of victorious French standards. Yet, knowing the discipline and power of the veteran Moslem army, he doubted the

evidence of his eyes that the emperor and the French could have pursued their foe so far.

"What ship is that?" cried a high voice, and the splash of hoofs sounded in the rushes as a man rode out toward the galleass.

"Venetian," answered Michael promptly. "Is the battle won?"

The men on the vessel held their breath as the rider, before answering, swam his horse out to them and, grasping at ropes lowered over the stern where the oar-banks permitted him to gain the side of the galleass, climbed heavily upon the deck.

"If you are a Venetian—fly!" he cried, staggering against Michael. "Never have the eyes of God seen such a defeat. Bayezid has sworn he will stable his horse in Saint Peter's. I am alone, of a company of knights who followed the Constable of France."

Michael Bearn gripped the knight by the shoulder fiercely.

"The Constable of France — defeated——"

"Slain."

The wounded man was too weary to be surprized at the fire in the eyes that burned into his. Michael drew a long breath. He was too late. And his countrymen had fallen before Bayezid.

The knight was removing his mail hood with shaking hands.

"We thought the Saracen was shattered," he said hopelessly. "Our camp was surprized, yet the French mounted and rode to the attack, through the skirmishers and the cavalry with white woolen hats——"

"The Janisseries," nodded Michael.

"—and past them, into the ranks of the horse-guards that are called Sipahis, of Bayezid. Our lances, forsooth, had broken them asunder. We had lost many and our ranks were ill-formed when we gained the summit of the hill where we found not a rabble of defeated soldiery, but a forest of forty thousand lances. Ah, Saint Denis!"

"Bayezid ever keeps his best troops till the last."

"He has ordered slain ten thousand Christian captives, sparing only the Count of Nevers and twenty knights. I escaped."

"And the emperor——?"

"Floats down the river in a boat. He made a brave stand, 'tis said, until the Serbs joined the Moslems and struck his flank——"

"'Tis done. Rest you and sleep." Michael spoke curtly, what with the hurt of the news. "There are wounded to be brought off from shore."

URGING his vessel almost upon the shore, he formed his men-at-arms into lines to pass out what of the injured they could find, while he made his way inland to turn aside the fugitives he met into the galleass.

He saw only haggard and dusty men, weaponless and exhausted. On mules and purloined horses camp-followers dashed past along the highway, striking aside those who got in their path. Semblance of order or discipline there was none.

Wounded foot-soldiers who had cast aside their heavier armor limped into the light of the burning houses near by, silent and grim-lipped. Michael was mustering a group of these at the water's edge when a mailed horseman spurred up and grasped at his shoulder.

"For the love of ——! Is't true there is a ship at hand?"

Michael looked up under drawn brows and saw a handsome Italian cavalier, his velvet finery besmirched and his jeweled cap awry.

"A hundred ducats, sailor, if you will take me on your ship at once," the horseman cried, fingering at a heavy purse with a quivering hand.

"Spare your purse-strings and wait your turn," responded Michael shortly.

But the cavalier, befuddled by fear, was pushing aside the watchful foot-soldiers, to leap at the ropes that had been lowered from the vessel, when Michael's left arm, thrust across his chest, stayed him.

"You are a captain, *signor*," he observed quietly. "Help me to get these wounded to safety."

The Italian glanced back and saw that a fresh route of fugitives had come into the light at the shore. A tall bazaar trader with his servants was striking down those who sought to climb into a muddy cart drawn by nearly exhausted horses. Michael could read the fear in the red-bearded face of the trader. A woman, her skirt dragging about her knees, ran screaming into the path of the cart, holding out imploring arms.

The servants, under the oaths of their bearded master, lashed the horses on and

the woman, in all her sad finery, was cast to earth under the hoofs of the beasts. The cart disappeared into the darkness but she lay where she had fallen.

"You see!" cried the Italian. "Death is upon us unless we fly. Out of my way, dogs——"

Drawing back his arm, Michael struck the man, sending him headlong into the water. Heedless of the blow, the other rose and fought his way to the ropes that offered a way to safety.

"Wo!" His cry came back to Michael. "Death is upon us. Fly!"

"Fly!" echoed the wounded, struggling toward the ropes. "The Turks are at our heels."

Those who could not stand unsupported were thrust down into the water. Men, striking at one another's heads and tearing at the surcoats which bore a crimson cross—the stronger among the fugitives, up to their necks in water, fought for the ropes.

When Michael at last—seeing that the galleass was crowded to capacity—clambered up the gilded woodwork of the stern and gave the signal to get under weigh, the tumult on shore took on a fiercer note.

Looking back, he could see the flash of simitars among the huddle of the flying. Lean, turbaned horsemen wheeled and charged through the burning houses. A shrill shout pierced the wails of the injured.

"*Ya, Allah! Hai—Allah—hai!*"

Michael Bearn, hearing this familiar cry of triumph of the Moslems, saw again in his mind's eye the ruined villages of Armenia, the tortured slaves, and—most clearly of all—the grave in the sand before the Gate of Shadows.

He looked at the two men beside him, the sleeping French knight whose valor had been fruitless, and the sullen Italian officer who regarded him askance, fingering his bruised face.

The army of crusaders that he had journeyed for a year to join was no more. And Bayezid, angered by the loss of so many of his men, had doomed ten thousand captives to death. Was there no power on earth that could match the Thunderbolt?

"I wonder," thought Michael. He knew that of one place Bayezid was afraid, or at least that the Thunderbolt shunned that place.

It was the Gate of Shadows.

III

THE BLOW IN THE DARK

IT WAS an hour after vespers and the lights of Saint Mark's were glowing softly against the vault of the sky over the great city of Venice. Along the narrow streets, however, and the winding canals the square houses with their grilled doors and carved stonework showed only slits of light from barred windows.

At that hour worthy citizens of the City of the Lagoons went abroad attended only by linkmen and with armed retainers to guard their backs. Those who were more cautious, or who had more powerful enemies, paid *bravi* to watch the retainers.

A stranger wandering from the lagoons and the main canals would soon have lost his way. In the poorer quarters where the high buildings seemed to lean together against the sky men looked closely into the faces of those they met and turned the corners wide.

Near the Piazza where the walled palaces of the nobles lined the canals the alleys were filled with refuse and ended more often than not in a blind wall. Servants stood whispering in the shadows of the postern doors and often a soft laugh came from an invisible balcony overhead.

"A pox on these castles," said Michael Bearn heartily. "Is there never a place where a body can see before and behind him at the same time?"

He glanced up, trying fruitlessly to guess his direction by the few stars visible between the buildings. All that he could make out was that he seemed to be standing in a space where two alleys crossed. Listening, he could hear the music of fiddles and flutes somewhere near at hand.

A fête, he knew, was going on in a near-by palace and he had promised himself a sight of it. It was exasperating to hear the sound of the festivity and still be unable to reach it. Michael laughed, realizing that he had lost his way completely.

There had been no lack of offers of a guide. For only that day Michael had received a gold chain and a key of the same precious metal from the *Consoli di Mercanti*—the Maritime Council—as reward for his services in bringing back a galley with the survivors of the army of the Count of Nevers from the ill-fated field of Nicopolis.

It had been a stormy passage, beset by Turkish pirates in the Levant, and Bearn, thanks to his skill as mariner and his knack of handling men, had been one of the few captains to return without loss.

But in spite of this honor Michael's purse was light and he could not afford to pay a retainer, or even to take up his quarters at a good inn.

"Faith," he thought, "'twould have availed more if the worthy council had given gold ducats instead of this chain, and as for the freedom of the city that they said went with the key—I can not find my way to yonder music."

He had heard mention of the fête at the council, and also of a renowned voyager who was to be present. Two things had drawn Michael to the festivity; the hope of good meat and wine—he had not wanted to confess to the ceremonious members of the great council that he was penniless—and curiosity. Voyagers from the East were few in that age and Michael wondered whether he would find at the palace Fra Odoric, the priest who had built a church in Tatary or Carlo Zeno, the sea-captain.

Either one would have information that would serve Michael in his plans.

His reflections were interrupted by a light rounding the corner of a building and gliding toward him under his feet. He was surprized to see that he was standing on a wooden bridge. The light was in a gondola passing beneath him.

"Ho, my friends," he called cheerfully, "in what quarter lies the *palazzo* or whatever it is called of my lord Contarini? I can find it not."

If Michael had dwelt longer in Venice he would not have hailed an occupied gondola in the dark. His shout only caused the rower at the stern to glance up warily and thrust the long craft forward at greater speed. A shutter in the hooded seat was lowered briefly and a face looked out of the aperture.

Then the gondola passed under the bridge.

Michael grimaced, bowed, and was passing on when he hesitated. The light on the gondola had been put out.

This was not altogether strange, if the people on the vessel had believed that footpads, as personified by Michael, were on the bridge. But the keen eyes of the seaman caught a white swirl in the water. He fancied that the gondolier had checked his craft sharply and that it had halted a short distance beyond the bridge.

If the occupants of the gondola had been alarmed by his hail, they would not have chosen to remain in the vicinity. So Michael thought and was ready to smile at his own suspicion, when he heard a footfall and the clink of steel upon stones. From the direction in which he imagined the gondola had halted a man was coming toward him, feeling his way with drawn sword.

Michael planted his feet wide, with his back against a blank wall. Presently he could discern the grayish blur of a face moving toward him over the bridge. There was no sound and Michael knew that the newcomer was taking pains to be silent. This quietude and the rapidity of the other's approach from the canal were ominous.

Then Michael stepped aside. He had heard rather than seen a swift movement toward him in the gloom.

Steel clashed against the wall beside him and sparks flew. An oath came to his ears as he snatched out his own sword, hung by its baldric on his right side. Long practise had accustomed Michael to the use of his left arm—had given to that limb the unusual strength possessed by one-armed men.

In the darkness he sought the other's blade, found it, thrust and when the thrust was parried, lunged again.

"By the Pope's head!" snarled the stranger.

"Amen," said Michael, drawing back alertly.

His weapon had bent against mail on the other's chest and Michael, who wore no such protection, was fain to risk a leap and come to hand-grips.

But even as he tensed his muscles for the spring he heard footsteps and the darkness was dissipated by the light of a lanthorn which rounded a corner behind him.

For the first time he saw his antagonist, a tall man, very fashionable in the short mantle and wide velvet sleeves and cloth-of-gold cap that were the fashion of the day in Venice. The man's olive face was handsome and composed, his eyes restless, his beard smartly curled.

His right hand held the broken half of a sword, his left a long poniard. Michael was rather glad that, after all, he had not made that leap.

Whereupon Michael frowned, for the other's face, although not his bearing, had a familiar aspect. Sheathing his own sword, the Breton smiled and took his dagger in his left hand.

"Good morrow, *signor*," he said from hard lips. "The light is better now than when you traitorously set upon me. Shall we resume with our poniards?"

The other hesitated, measuring Michael, noting the width of shoulder and length of arm of the Breton, whose featherless cap was thrust well back, disclosing black curls a little gray about the brows. Under the curls gray eyes, alight and whimsical, met the stranger's stare.

"You ponder, *signor*," prompted Michael politely. "Perhaps it surprizes you that I who bore no weapon on shipboard have now mastered the use of blade and poniard with my one hand. Or perchance your sense of honor and the high courage you display in a crisis prompt you to refrain from matching daggers with a man in a leathern shirt when you wear a mail jerkin."

At this an exclamation sounded behind him. Michael had not failed to glance over his shoulder at the first appearance of the light and had seen only a fox-faced merchant in a long ermine cloak and attended by a brace of servitors who looked as if they would have liked to flee at sight of bare steel.

Now he perceived that the merchant was staring at him round-eyed as if Michael had uttered blasphemy or madness.

"By the rood!" swore the tall stranger.

"By whatever you wish," assented Michael, "so long as you fight like a man. Come, the sight of a coward spoils my appetite for dinner."

HE WAITED for the other's rush. Michael had recognized in his assailant the Italian captain of mercenaries who had struck down his wounded countrymen in the effort to force himself aboard Michael's galley at Nicopolis. The other must have recognized him from the gondola and had sought the revenge he had sworn for Michael's blow.

Instead of resuming the duel, the Italian smiled coldly and stepped back, pointing to his chest where the doublet was slashed over the mail.

"I do not fight with cutthroats, Messer Soranzi," the Italian said to the merchant, who was staring at them, excusing his action. "This sailor beset me on the bridge after hailing my gondola under pretext of asking his way. You can see where he struck me."

The shrewd eyes of the merchant went from one to the other and he fingered his own stout belly tenderly.

"A lie," remarked the Breton promptly, "and a base one, forsooth. This fellow's blade is snapped and you can see on the stones behind me where it broke off."

Soranzi stared at him curiously and uneasily.

"You must be mad, good sir," he observed, "to wish to encounter further Pietro Rudolfo, the famous swordsman and *condottiere*."

"Faith," grinned Michael. "Is it madness to face the famous Rudolfo, instead of waiting to receive his knife in your back?"

He marked in his memory the name of his enemy. Rudolfo in spite of the open insult did not renew the fight. Instead he muttered that he had no time for night prowlers when he had already been delayed too long on his way to the house of a friend.

The merchant was sidling past Michael, holding up his long skirts, and shot a sharp question at the Breton, once he had gained the Italian's side, accompanied by his men.

"Your name and state, *signor?*"

Michael nodded at Rudolfo to indicate that the *condottiere* knew both but Rudolfo was silent.

"You have an excellent memory, Ser Pietro," the Breton commented, "for it impelled you to let out my blood. Yet must I salve it myself. "

To Soranzi he said—

"I am called Michael Bearn, the master-mariner."

At this the merchant glanced at Rudolfo in some surprize for it was known from the Rialto to Saint Mark's that the young Breton had been honored that day by the all-powerful council. The interests of Venice and its merchants lay upon the sea and the dictates of the Maritime Council were law.

Moreover Michael's bearing was hardly that of a cutthroat. Soranzi murmured diplomatically:

"Now that you two worthy captains have reached an understanding it behooves me to

press upon my way. I am in haste to hear a most wonderful tale of a voyager who has found a new road to the riches of the East, more vast than those narrated by Ser Marco Polo himself."

Michael bowed, realizing that Rudolfo would not fight now.

"Will you direct me," he asked, "to the fête of my lord Contarini, the leader of the great council? I have lost my way."

Soranzi's lips parted to respond, but Rudolfo nudged him.

"Follow this alley," the *condottiere* directed curtly, "in the direction Messer Soranzi came for some distance."

With that he turned on his heel, took the arm of Soranzi and with a backward glance walked away across the bridge. The lanthorn was soon lost to sight around a bend in a street where Michael had been wandering.

Sheathing his dagger, the Breton listened to the retreating footsteps, and laughed heartily but silently in the darkness.

"'Tis a rare jest," he thought. "Soranzi perchance would have directed me aright, but the excellent Rudolfo saw fit to send me mum-chance in the wrong course. Aye, I make no doubt they are bound to the Palazzo Contarini themselves."

The reflection that Rudolfo had been at pains to keep him away from the fête caused Michael wonder whether the *condottiere* had not had a stronger motive than the desire for revenge in attacking him. Rudolfo had known from Michael's own words that he was bound for the Contarini Palace.

Of course it would not be particularly pleasing to Rudolfo to have Michael appear at the palace where they would, perhaps, meet. But surely if the captain of mercenaries had merely wished the killing of Michael his wish could better have been fulfilled by sending *bravi* after the Breton when the latter left the palace.

Michael felt sure that Rudolfo had good reason for wanting at some cost to keep him from the palace.

By now Michael was conscious again that he was very hungry. Opposition served to whet his desire to go to the fête. Following the retreating footsteps by ear, he passed over the bridge again, into a dark passage he had not noticed before that led him presently out upon a wide terrace overlooking a brightly lighted court.

IV

MICHAEL IS ADMITTED

SORANZI and Rudolfo were just disappearing within the gate of the Contarini house. A throng of gondoliers and servitors grouped on the steps that led from the tiles of the court to the door gave back with low bows. Just as ceremoniously a chamberlain, standing within the entrance, greeted them—as Michael observed.

He cast a swift glance around the court. It fronted a canal by which the guests were coming to the fête. In one corner some fiddlers and flute-players assisted by a bedraggled dancing bear were amusing the waiting servants and helping to empty a huge table of its meat and wine.

It was this music he had heard from the alleys in the rear of the establishment.

Near at hand a fat Turkish gymnast in a soiled silk *khilat* was making the commoners gape by balancing two swords, one above the other, on his forehead and squealing shrilly as if to call attention to his prowess.

From a window of the palace the low sound of a woman's laugh floated out over the court. It was not a pleasant laugh, holding as it did a veiled note of discontent.

"That would be the new *donna*, my lord Contarini's choice of a mistress," observed one lackey in the throng about the sword-juggler to another.

"A red-headed she-fox," mumbled a second who had had his share of red wine. "'Grant I stumble not over her train——'"

"Or spill aught on her finery. 'Tis said she craves jewels as ye thirst for the flagon. She it was that coaxed my lord—who is made o' drier stuff, —— wot—to have the voyager tell his tale."

"Nay." The lackey nodded solemnly over a tankard. "All Venice repeats that the riches of Cathay are found at last. Hide o' the ——, 'twill do us no good, but Messer Rat-Face Soranzi has come running, holding up his skirts like a woman——"

Both laughed and Michael smiled at the description of the stout merchant with the thin face. He was ascending the steps confidently when the chamberlain stopped him at the door.

"I know not your face, *signor*. Were you bidden to the palace this evening?"

Michael halted, his foot on the top step. Looking down the long hall within, he could

see groups of the guests, young men in short cloaks of every hue, wearing under these tight tunics of crimson velvet and gold cloth, elderly men in long fur mantles, women in the jeweled exuberance of dress and with the red-dyed hair that was a fad of the time.

The splendor of it caused him to gasp. Meanwhile the chamberlain was insolently eying Michael's boots of soft leather and his ragged mantle.

"I have the freedom of the city," murmured Michael, still intent on the spectacle within.

It was the turn of the worthy chamberlain to gape and seize his long staff in righteous wrath. A commoner sought entrance to the fête at the Palazzo Contarini!

In another moment the guardian of the gate would have shouted for the servitors to fling Michael into the canal. It was well, perhaps, for all concerned that a diversion occurred at this point.

A group of lackeys approached the door from within, hauling along a shrinking, stumbling figure in grotesquely striped attire. It was the figure of a hunchback wearing a jester's cap.

Behind the lackeys and their captive strolled several courtiers, smiling expectantly.

"Give him to the bear to play with!" cried a servitor.

"Nay, set the dogs on him."

"Aye—the dogs, the dogs!" cried the courtiers. "'Twill be better sport than bear-baiting itself."

Michael saw that the craggy face of the jester was pale and that he winced at mention of the dogs. The anxious glance of the hunchback met his and then circled away as if vainly seeking some avenue of escape.

"Hold," spoke up the chamberlain irresolutely, addressing the courtiers and ignoring Michael in the more pressing matter at hand: "This is good Bembo, my lord's fool and favorite. Would you slay him, *signori?*"

"Verily is he a fool," answered one of the young nobles carelessly, "and so must pay for his folly."

"Not so. He is no man's fool," corrected another, "and so the dogs will have his limbs for their sport. 'Tis an ill-shapen thing, by the archangel!"

"Bembo," whispered a lackey, "had the cursed luck to spill a dish of sirup of figs on the train of the *donna*, who is in a rage thereby. To appease her my lord has cast off the ill-begotten fool and my lady has bidden us make sport of him. The dogs—ho, the dogs!"

While one varlet ran eagerly out of the hall, evidently to fetch the dogs of the household, the courtiers dragged Bembo to the door and called the crowd below in the court to witness the coming spectacle.

A joyful shout went up and the servitors deserted both table and Turk to enjoy the more attractive spectacle of a human being worried by the teeth of animals. Michael had a swift recollection of his own torture at the hands of Bayezid's men and the way in which the slaves thronged to watch his suffering.

His back stiffened and he swung his right arm gently at his side—the only movement of which it was capable. And he stood his ground at the head of the stairs, although the courtiers were pushing against him.

"Strip him," counseled a rough voice from below—the same lackey who had commented upon the fiery temper of his mistress a moment ago. "The dogs will bite the fool more toothsomely if he be naked."

"Aye, aye, strip him!" the cry went up.

"Stay," said Michael gravely to the courtiers. "The man is a cripple, wherefore would it be small honor to you, *messires*, to make game of him."

"Blood of the saints!" A young fellow with a face like a woman made response. "By the splendor of heaven, what have we here?"

The chamberlain saw an opportunity to please the nobles.

"A man, my lord of Mocenigo," he informed loudly, "who claims the freedom of the city and so the liberty to attend the fête of my lord Contarini."

The jester's lined face had brightened at Michael's words, but now he appeared hopeless once more. Not so Mocenigo, who scented a finer jest, even, than the tormenting of Bembo.

"He does not look like a lack-wit, this burgher-sailor," he vouchsafed, wrinkling his nose, "but—phah—methinks he is foul of the sea."

They stared at Michael, the crowd below pushing and elbowing to gain a better view. A gentleman laughed and the lackeys guffawed. That a common sailor, or so they

thought, should have construed the freedom of the city as an invitation to the fête!

A distant snarling and barking sounded from within the palace, plainly to be heard now that the fiddlers had ceased playing in order to watch the spectacle.

"Throw them both to the dogs; strip them both," called a lackey from the rear of the throng.

But Michael's glance had sought out the courtier who had laughed, and his gray eyes were very hard. Seeing his set face, those nearest him with the exception of the slightly intoxicated Mocenigo, gave back slightly.

"No need to fetch the dogs, my good cur," Michael smiled at the man who had laughed. "The pack is here and—till now—in full cry."

There was an exclamation at this and a rustling of feet. The servitors sensed a quarrel and realized from the way Michael spoke that he was a Frenchman of good blood. Whereupon they discreetly waited for the quarrel to be taken up by their betters.

"'Od's death!" swore the courtier who had laughed, making however no move forward. "Seize him, ye varlets, and hale him into the lagoon."

The lackeys nearest Michael advanced obediently, but without enthusiasm. Baiting a victim lost its savor when the prey showed fight. Then one of them cried out shrilly:

"Ho, this is Master Bearn who conquered the Turks in the Orient. Not an hour since he overcame Pietro Rudolfo in the street with his sword."

A silence fell on the group at the head of the stairs. The servants remembered that they were unarmed and retreated promptly. Bembo looked up again with hope in his wavering eyes.

Michael, standing his ground with his left hand at his belt, reflected that Rudolfo must have a reputation here.

Muttering something about looking to the dogs, the man who had laughed slipped away, accompanied by his fellows. Mocenigo swore roundly after them and clutched uncertainly at his sword.

At once Michael stepped forward, gripping the other's wrist and wrenching downward as the young noble started to free his blade from its scabbard. The weapon clattered to the tiled floor and Mocenigo's right hand was helpless in Michael's left.

Now the courtier was no younger than the seaman, but his smooth face made a strong contrast with Michael's brown countenance wherein the skin was drawn taut over jutting bones and deep lines ran from nose to mouth.

Mocenigo, flushed, made no struggle, knowing that his strength was overmatched; instead he waited with a dangerous quiet for Michael to strike or taunt or reach for a weapon. He did not know that the Breton had but one useful arm.

"You are no coward," grunted Michael, "but you carry your wine badly, my lord. The cups make a man quarrelsome."

With that he released Mocenigo, picked up the latter's weapon, handed it to him and turned his back. The courtier handled his blade irresolutely, staring at the seaman's back.

"Close the door," Michael was instructing the chamberlain, who—seeing that Mocenigo made no move—obeyed, thus shutting out the curious throng in the court.

"You were best away from here, Bembo," said Michael quickly to the jester. "Some side postern; this is your chance."

When Bembo had vanished from the hall he wheeled on the gazing Mocenigo. "This mocking of a fool ill beseems your chivalry my lord."

At this the young courtier flushed more deeply than before, and sheathed his sword covertly. "'Od's blood, *signor*, you are a strange man and a ready one. I was in the wrong and I apologize." He bowed gracefully. "Surely you are of gentle blood in France?"

"Nay, *signor*—my mother was of gentlefolk, but I am a commoner, without land or till."

Michael nodded affably to the perplexed chamberlain.

"Now that I am here, announce me to your master. In the haste of the moment I forgot to say that he bade me come to the fête."

But when the three sought Contarini they found him and the circle of his friends seated, listening to the tale of the voyager. Only one of the listeners noticed Michael's entry into the audience chamber in the rear of the assemblage and that one was Pietro Rudolfo.

V

CATHAY

"GREAT lords, counts, knights, burgesses and ladies! Attend ye, dispose yourselves to listen. Never have your ears been greeted by such a tale as this. Never have soldiers, priests, sailors or astrologers breathed such a romance as this true recital.

"*Signori*, ladies; no man hath so much knowledge and experience of the divers parts of the world—and especially that of Cathay—as hath Messer Ruy de Gonzales Clavijo!"

The speaker, broad as he was tall, black-bearded and mellow of voice, bowed very low, sweeping the heron plume of his cap across the floor of the library of the Contarini Palace. His enormous cloak of Armenian velvet vied in color with his scarlet doublet of Persian silk.

"I am Messer Ruy de Gonzales Clavijo," he concluded.

In the library were gathered the leading spirits among the guests. Contarini with his mistress beside him sat directly before the speaker. Close behind him the pale face of Soranzi, the merchant, gleamed in the candle-light.

A hundred years ago Marco Polo had completed his book. Discredited at first, it had been confirmed to great extent by wandering Franciscan monks. It was known in Europe that Cathay existed somewhere at the eastern end of the world—this side of the Sea of Darkness.

Venetian galleys were engaged in trade with Persia and Arabia, at Ormuz. Continued tidings of the vast resources of silk, spices and gems in China and India came in. The door of the farther East had been half-opened. Venice was agog with rumors of the riches of the Indies and the Pope had more than once sent emissaries to find the land of Prester John.

"Consider, my lord—" Clavijo bowed to Contarini—"the marvel that I have seen. It is no less than a city of brazen walls, in the desert where a hundred caravan routes meet. It lies behind the lofty mountains which are a natural wall beyond the last of the three seas—Ægean, Mormaior and the Dead Sea that is of salt, as you know."

The listeners nodded. Venetians to the heart, they knew the geography of the Black Sea and something of the Caspian. Clavijo, the Spaniard, went on.

"Seven years ago, my lord, did Ser Clavijo set out humbly from Constantinople over the perilous waters of Mormaior where no ships may have iron in them, lest the devil's loadstone that is at the bottom of the sea should draw out nails and braces and every soul perish."

Contarini shrugged. He did not set much store by the superstitions of the sea. Clavijo pointed to the map on the silver globe beside him.

"It was not the least of the marvels, my lord, that Ser Clavijo attained to the farther shore of this sea where the spirits of the waste are said to lie in wait for travelers. Aye, he heard their mutterings in the night, on the desert floor, and in the morning his servant was dead. The natives say that this muttering comes from the sands—the *reg ruwan*, talking sands. Yet Clavijo makes no doubt that demons are to be met in the waste places.

"But beyond here exists a rich and fertile valley. My lord, it may well be that this is no less than the Eden of the Bible. Forasmuch as the Bible relates that the three strange kings came to the birth of Christ, bearing rich gifts of incense and myrrh, it is reasonable to suppose that this legend relates to Cathay, which may well be the kingdom of Prester John."

He glanced mildly at his intent audience. A dozen times within the last fortnight had the Spaniard been called upon to tell his story and by now he well knew the phrases that best appealed to the religiously inclined. As for the ladies——

"The way to this valley is most difficult to encompass; forby bands of Moorish horsemen do swoop upon the unwary. It was one of these bands that came on Clavijo, alone in the desert, and guided him, a prisoner, through the storms of sand that are more fearful than the tempest of the sea. In this way he was taken to the gate in the brazen wall.

"Inside that gate he perceived the trees of gold and silver, of which you have heard, and the fountains that run wine more delicious than the famous Chian.

"Great jewels are the fruit in these gardens of the brazen city. The inhabitants are fair of face and speak a Moorish tongue. Alas, your servant Clavijo has not the gift of words to describe all that he saw. Moreover,

he was a prisoner, kept for the pleasure of the Grand Cham who is the king of this place."

Clavijo's broad face turned toward the stately red-haired woman who was the mistress of his host.

"My lady, it came to his ears in the city of the Grand Cham that all who entered the valley never got any older. There is no time in this city of Cathay, and people do as they please. It is a most pleasant spot. Many marvels Clavijo heard there—of the cameleopard and the taurelephus that gives most rare milk. But concerning this Clavijo can not know the truth. The gardens and the Cathayans he saw with his own eyes. Some of the silk of the place he had made into a doublet and this you yourselves may see——"

Clavijo tapped his broad chest with a smile.

"This is but a poor specimen. The robes of the slaves of the Grand Cham are of the sheerest gossamer, my ladies. The emeralds on his fingers are large as hens' eggs. The perfumes of the palace are finer than the dried roses of Persia."

The women who had been listening sleepily until now looked up with interest.

"Living unto themselves as they do, the Cathayans have no knowledge of the value of gold in the other world. It comes, Clavijo heard, from the mines of Ectag, sometimes called the Golden Mountains. Here there be slaves who labor in the mines, and but for the grace of God Clavijo would be such a slave."

The small eyes of Guistani Soranzi widened and he plucked at the edge of his fur robe.

"Did you bring back some of the gold, Messer Clavijo?" he asked.

"Alas, some I took with me when I fled from the city, but necessity compelled me to cast it away when I crossed the desert." Clavijo stepped back and bowed. "My escape was due to one of the servants of the Cham who was a Christian at heart. Otherwise, it would not have been possible to surmount the brazen walls."

"And the Grand Cham?" put in Rudolfo curiously. "What was he?"

"Some called him Cham, some Khan. Perchance the two words be the same. He is like to the Emperor of the Chin, because Persian and Turk and other pagan sultans render him tribute. Also, of all the caravans that pass by the valley he takes tribute. Some say he has the powers of a potent magician, yet this must be because he has the wisdom of a hundred years."

CLAVIJO ceased his tale with a low bow. Contarini studied him with green, fathomless eyes, but the mistress of Contarini was a-quiver with eagerness and whispered to him of the gems of Cathay that might adorn her beauty.

Rudolfo's elegant figure advanced to exchange greetings with the voyager, as did the other guests with the exception of Michael, who remained leaning against the wall, rubbing his chin reflectively as if something puzzled him greatly.

He saw that Clavijo presently left the throng. Straightway Michael followed down a narrow hall that led to an alcove where a table loaded with fruits, wines and sweetmeats awaited the guests who had not yet arrived.

Somewhat to Michael's surprize the portly Spaniard dug his fingers into a fine dish—peacock pie. From the pie his hands went to his mouth. His bearded chin worked voraciously and the pie diminished apace.

Michael's hunger came upon him anew and he joined the man on the other side of the table.

"By your leave, Messer Voyager."

His left hand began to make havoc with the remnant of the pastry.

Clavijo glanced at him from small black eyes, as if disturbed by the interruption.

"It irks me to eat alone," smiled Michael invitingly. "Come, good sir, I see you looked at yonder Sicilian grapes desirefully. Proceed. Consume. Your long suffering in the Orient must have given you a rare stomach for such fare. See, I join you."

The Spaniard wiped his beard with the back of his hand and with the other covertly fastened upon some brandied figs. He seemed to have an unlimited appetite.

"Verily, I see that you are a man of parts," said Michael again. "Let me call to your notice this excellent Chian wine. A toast, Messer Clavijo—a toast."

"Ah."

The Spaniard nodded approvingly and poured out two cups of the fine wine. Michael, who had had enough of the food, lifted his politely.

"To Cathay," he announced, bowing.

"To Cathay," responded the other heartily.

"Sir, I know you not, but you are good company and a man of rare discernment——"

Clavijo fell silent and his mouth opened wide, while he did not raise his cup. Michael, glancing quickly over his shoulder, saw that two men in uniform had entered the alcove.

They wore dark cloaks and carried only stilettos at their belts. Both wore black masks that concealed the whole of their faces with the exception of the eyes.

"*Madre de Dios!*" swore Clavijo.

The two masked servitors or officials—Michael could not decide which—advanced to the table.

"*Signori,*" said one, "which of you is the renowned voyager from the Orient?"

It was politely said and Michael set down his cup reflectively, seeing that Clavijo's eyes had widened at the words. Under the circumstances the newcomers might be seeking either the Spaniard or the Breton. Evidently, if they desired Clavijo, they had not been in the audience-chamber when the latter was telling his tale.

This inclined Michael to the belief that he was the man wanted. He wondered briefly if these were agents of Rudolfo, but remembered that the *condottiere* would hardly resume his quarrel in the home of Clavijo, unless imperatively urged.

It was hardly likely, furthermore, that Mocenigo would choose this way of punishing Michael for the scene at the door. Michael, unfamiliar with the customs of Venice, hazarded a guess that these were servants of Contarini sent to summon either him or Clavijo in this curious fashion.

"I am from the East," he responded, as the Spaniard was silent. "I am called Michael Bearn, of Brittany."

"Aye," put in Clavijo promptly, glancing involuntarily toward the hall down which the two had come; "this is the gentleman you seek."

Plainly he did not desire to go with the masked men. They, however, looked at each other questioningly and asked Clavijo's name, which was reluctantly given.

"*Signori,*" decided the one who had first spoken; "we were sent for the voyager from the Orient by one whom you both know. Since we can not be certain of your identity, will you both have the great kindness to come with us?"

Clavijo looked as if he would have liked to refuse, but the masked men ushered them down another hall and flight of steps. They passed out of the house into the darkness of an alley. The loom of the buildings against the stars, the smells and the distant echo of a flute assured Michael that they were now near the bridge where he had met Rudolfo.

It was his turn to be reluctant, yet Michael strode ahead, whistling between his teeth. He felt morally certain that the two attendants had come for Clavijo and that Clavijo did not want to go with them. And Michael wanted very much to see where Clavijo was being taken—where the Spaniard did not want to go.

A second stairway took them to a gondola, a torch at its bow. Michael recognized the Contarini crest on the gondola hood as he scrambled inside, followed by his companion, breathing heavily.

The two masked attendants took their stand fore and aft by the rowers. In the darkness of the small cabin Michael sat down on what he first thought to be a cushion and then made out to be the form of a man.

He said nothing, wondering if the man were dead, until a whisper came up to him:

"Signor Michael, a service for a service given. Pietro Rudolfo plots against you. I heard it whispered as I fled the palace."

It was Bembo. A moment's reflection showed that he must have hidden himself away in one of the Contarini gondolas, expecting to leave the palace unseen in this way. Michael eased his weight off the other.

"Do not yield me up, *signor*," went on the whisper. "Soon we shall be far off from the red-headed *donna* and the dogs and servants."

"Faith, I will not, Bembo. Are these masks Rudolfo's doing?"

"Nay, generous sir. They are servants of —Contarini."

A slight hesitation before the name did not escape the Breton's notice. "Whither are we bound? Have they business with me or Clavijo?"

"Clavijo." Bembo chose to answer the last question. "We—you and I—will be released at the *Con*—at the gate we are coming to——"

"Who in the fiend's name are you talking to?" demanded the Spaniard, who had been unable to understand the low whispers.

"A fiend—if it likes you, Messer

Voyager," murmured Michael. "He says the devil and all the hellish brood have seized upon you."

"*Madre de Dios!*"

Clavijo, it appeared, was superstitious and more than a little credulous. Then the boat stopped and the three—for Bembo joined them—stood before an iron-studded door in which a small square slid back, to cast a stream of light on their faces.

Michael saw a masked face staring at them through the aperture. Meanwhile the gondola and its men drew away from the landing and disappeared in the darkness.

Clavijo's olive countenance went a shade paler when he made out the stunted form of the hunchback. He had not seen Bembo at the fête and Michael's careless words had aroused his apprehensions.

Before he could speak the door opened wide and the figure within reached forth to pluck the Spaniard inside. The door was slammed in the faces of Bembo and his friend.

THROUGH the square peephole Michael could make out the two men inside withdrawing down a hall. A second glance showed him that they stood on a narrow stone landing with the black surface of the canal at their feet. The door presented the only means of leaving the steps.

"Bembo," whispered Michael, "unravel me this coil. Where are we, and why are we left like varlets on the threshold of this hospitable place?"

"Because, *signor* comrade," the jester grinned up at him in the dim light from the opening, "we are varlets—or at least the gate-keeper believes we look like such attendants of the great Spaniard. Your cloak is——"

Bembo hesitated, fearing to offend, but Michael answered readily.

"Zounds, 'tis shabby enow!"

"This is the entrance to the *Consoli di Mercanti*. So many masks mean that the council is in secret session. We had best content ourselves with hailing a passing gondola and making off with a whole hide, for we are both here by mistake."

Michael wondered why Bembo's presence had been taken for granted until the hunchback explained that he had often come here in attendance on Contarini and the guardians of the place could not know that he was no longer the servant of the great Contarini.

"Good," he said thoughtfully and pressed against the door, thrusting his left arm within the opening. Bembo plucked at his sleeve in sudden anxiety.

"What would you, *signor?*"

"Why, entrance, before yonder masked fellow returns to his post. I must hear what the council has to say to the voyager."

In spite of Bembo's protest that the night session was secret and that they both might end the evening in the damp cells of San Giorgio Maggiore prison, Michael worked away at the door until he had drawn back the bolts and pushed it open.

This done, he pulled the shivering hunchback into the stone passageway, closed the heavy portal and whispered:

"Now, good Bembo, you are verily a lost fool if you lead us not into a safe hiding-place where we may hear what is said in the council. You say that you know the intestines of this place of masks——"

Michael's words received sudden point by the sound of footsteps returning toward the passage. Bembo fled with a crab-like motion down the narrow hall and slipped aside into the shadows of another passage opening into it, and Michael ran after him silently.

Taking the Breton's hand in his, the jester led his new friend through the darkness down a winding flight of steps until the dampness indicated to Michael that they were under the canal.

Here they were in a confined space where the air, however, was not stale and two gleams of light pierced the gloom from one wall. Michael was somewhat taken aback to hear voices echoing clearly in the stone chamber, although they were plainly the only occupants.

"'Tis the whispering gallery," explained Bembo so softly that the words were barely discernible, "that gives upon the council chamber. My lord Contarini was wont at times to spy here upon the testimony of prisoners before the judges. Speak not, for the gallery runs overhead to an opening behind the councilors."

AS THE Council of Ten ruled political Venice, stamping out conspiracies and punishing any man it listed mercilessly and secretly, the *Consoli di Mercanti* ruled commercial Venice with an iron hand.

The prosperity of the *Signory* was linked

indissolubly with the expansion of its trade, the crushing of its rivals and the mastery of new routes into the East, such as gave to Venice the monopoly of the great salt industry. The methods of the council were secretive and cruel, but Venetian judges winked at this, so long as the trade-routes were held, concessions secured and enemies weakened.

Of these enemies Genoa was then the most pressing. A few years before the army and fleet of Genoa had almost crushed the city of the lagoons—Venice being freed only by the dogged courage of Pisani and the intrepidity of Carlo Zeno. Since then Genoa had used every means to extend its trade to the eastward, away from the immediate power of the Venetian galleys.

Both cities had vied in making agreements with the on-sweeping Osmanli Empire which was even then extending from Anatolia into the mainland of Europe. But behind the armies of Bayezid were the spices, silks and jewels of India, Persia and China—veritable Golcondas to the trading-cities which paid fat tribute for the privilege of plying the Black Sea and tapping the Damascus and Aleppo caravan-routes.

So much Michael Bearn knew.

Standing close to the wall of the whispering chamber, he found that the two holes fitted his eyes and that he could see a long table covered with papers and globe-maps behind which sat a dozen masked men and before which stood the carefully groomed form of Ruy de Gonzales Clavijo.

The council was in secret session. A masked attendant clad in the manner of those who had ushered Bembo and Michael to the place stood by the closed door. Michael, studying the forms of the men behind the long table, singled out one in the center as Contarini and at the first words knew that he was right.

The voices rang clearly in his ear, conducted by a cleverly contrived gallery that ran from the shadows over the table to the wall above Michael's head.

"*Signor*," began the man in the center of the councilors. "You were summoned to speak the truth. Do not fail."

Clavijo glanced at the speaker swiftly, and measured the ring of masked faces. His brow was moist and his plump cheeks were flushed.

"This evening—" he responded.

"This evening," Contarini took him up, "you babbled much nonsense and some news. *Signor*, we are concerned now with the trade of Venice. Frequently we have heard of a Tatar or Cathayan potentate beyond the Sarai Sea. We wish to learn if it was his court you visited."

At this Clavijo nodded understandingly. He looked serious, now that he had weighed the mood of these men.

"Aye, *signor*. Last night, I was about to remark, I spoke mainly of fabulous gems and garments and such like, for the pleasuring of the ladies. But now I place the poor fruits of my journey at your service. Question me, therefore, at your will."

"Exactly where lies this city?"

"As you have said, beyond the Sarai Sea, a journey of a week by horse, until you come to the foot of the Ectag * Mountains, called by the natives the Golden Mountains. The way lies over the desert floor and is perilous indeed."

"So, one may go by sea to Trebizond, where we have a *bailio* and thence—" Contarini consulted a map—"by caravan across the land of the tribes. Karabak, it is written here?"

"Aye, my lord. Marvelous it is to know that in that land there is a pillar of everlasting fire, rising from the ground with a blue flame——"

"Naphtha!" broke in a councilor. "Near to Batum. No miracle about that."

Michael studied the eyes of the questioners, greatly interested, much to Bembo's surprize.

"Not in the least," assented Clavijo gravely. "Yet there also I beheld the holy mountain of Ararat where first the blessed ark came to land after the Flood. And beyond there, my lords—beyond there lie the fields of solid salt, at the foot of the Sarai Sea, which signifies in Cathayan—Sea of Salt."

The councilors looked up at this, for the monopoly of the salt-trade was one of the greatest avenues of profit to Venice.

"That is good!" Contarini made a note and Clavijo smiled. "Now, what of your statement that this Cham of Cathay is aged beyond human years and a magician?"

"My lord, does he not dwell in this paradise of Cathay and was not the holy garden of Eden also a paradise? Have we not the testimony of the Bible itself that therein is no such thing as human age? Was not the

*The Akh-tagh.

holy garden itself in the paradise of Asia?"

"How do you know the Grand Cham is a magician?"

Clavijo smiled, shrugged and hesitated, but one of the councilors spoke up.

"The good Fra Odoric of Pordenone himself visited these regions *con pelegrino*—as a pilgrim. Did he not see great piles of human skulls raised to the sky and the horns of beasts stuck upright upon mountaintops? Also divers wonders such as a city upon the sand which vanished as he walked toward it? Aye, and he mentioned that the sand spoke with a human voice."

Hereupon Clavijo drew a long breath of satisfaction and twiddled his curled beard.

"As I myself have said," he reminded Contarini, who alone among the councilors seemed to weigh his testimony doubtfully. The punishment by the Maritime Council of one who gave false testimony before it was no light thing.

"These miracles have my eyes beheld. Lo, I sat upon such a pile of human skulls, reaching a thousand lance-lengths toward the sky—the bones of those who aforetime sought the earthly paradise and failed."

"The Grand Cham must be a potent monarch," mused Contarini. "Aye, I mind me Fra Odoric spoke of a great Khan of Tatary who was the most merciless warrior upon the face of the earth——"

Michael strained his ears to catch the rest of the sentence, but Contarini had bent over a globe-map and was silent.

" 'Khan' signifies 'Cham' in the pagan tongue," put in Clavijo, who seemed to be better pleased with the way things were going now.

MAPS were produced and it was found that Ptolemy had outlined a kingdom beyond the Sarai Sea, under the star Taurus, and named it Chin, or Chinae.

"Which is verily the Chitae of Fra Odoric and my Cathay," pointed out the Spaniard. Sweeping his hand across the table in an eloquent gesture, he raised his voice.

"Here lies the power and magic of the East, *signori*. Alone, my comrades dead, I crawled from the brazen walls to bear this message to you. Others, like the good fra, have heard of the Grand Cham—or seen the city at a distance. But I—I have walked under the gold trees and heard the song of the slaves of a hundred races laboring in the mines in the bowels of the earth. I have looked upon the riches of pearls, emeralds, topazes set into the walls of houses. Beside the city of the Grand Cham Constantinople is a rook's nest and Venice—pardon, but Venice is no more than a village."

Perceiving that his voice fell into ready ears, he folded his arms, his uneasiness vanished.

"I have spoken of jewels. My lords, upon the person of the Grand Cham and his radiant women there are solid plaques of emeralds and rubies, greater than those that you have brought in your galleys from Persia. And these jewels the Cathayans value not, save as handsome ornaments."

"What do the Cathayan folk value—in trade?"

"Perchance weapons, rare steel, cunning inventions such as the sand clock and musical organs."

Bembo, who was still shivering from apprehension, now noticed that Michael's shoulders were quivering as if the Breton were stricken with the ague and that his hand was pressed against his mouth.

Within the council hall Contarini rose as if satisfied.

"Messer Clavijo," he said gravely, "if your tale had proved a lie you would have had a taste of the iron beds of San Giorgio Maggiore. But we are well content with the news you bring, and it is now fitting that we announce to you the result of our deliberations before your examination. This morning I had speech with a French mariner of the name of Bearn who warned me that the Turkish power threatens the safety of the great city of Constantinople and Venice. That is idle talk and the council is concerned only with trade, not politics. Yet this foe of the Turks confessed that somewhere beyond the Sarai Sea is a Khan of Tatary who must be a potent monarch."

He paused and Bembo saw again that Michael grimaced strangely.

"The council has planned an expedition into the *terra incognita*," went on Contarini. "A jealous merchant will be sent with proper escort. By fair means or foul—mark me—he must win us wealth from the Cham. Our galleys will bear the voyagers safely through the Turkish pirates. You will be the leader of the expedition."

Clavijo was a graven figure of amazement.

"I?"

"Verily. Venice will honor fittingly the

discoverer of the new trade-route—when you return. But return successful, for we have no clemency for one who fails."

A flush mounted to the Spaniard's brow which had become moist again.

"I? My lord, the way is perilous. Scarce I es——"

"By your own words you would fain visit again this city that is an earthly paradise. You know the way. Have no fear that you will not be rewarded."

CLAVIJO started to speak again, hesitated and bowed low. Then he jumped and swore roundly. A roaring, mighty laugh broke the silence of the council chamber. Yet none of the councilors had uttered a sound and certainly Clavijo and the attendant had not presumed to laugh.

Contarini it was who broke the spell of stupefaction by starting up and looking angrily at the wall behind which, in the whispering gallery, Michael Bearn was doubled up with mirth, laughing until he coughed.

The sound, magnified by the hidden gallery, had burst upon the councilors like a thunderclap and not a few crossed themselves in awe.

"By the blessed Saint Lawrence and his gridiron!" Bembo pulled at his companion in a frenzy of alarm. "Are you mad? They will be here in a minute with drawn swords. Come, or you will end your laugh in a dungeon——"

Fairly skipping with anxiety, he guided the still chuckling Michael up the steps, and listened a moment alertly. Michael seemed indifferent to the peril that was real enough to Bembo.

Hearing the sound of pikes striking the floor in the direction of the council chamber, Bembo turned the other way at the head of the stairs. He knew that there was a warder at the postern door by which they had entered.

So, instead of retracing his steps, he ran up another flight of stairs, slowing down as he emerged with Michael into a tapestried hall where several attendants without masks lounged.

"The council has broken up," Bembo announced when the servants glanced at him inquiringly. At the foot of the stair behind them Michael could see Contarini pass hastily toward the listening chamber with a group of halberdiers.

Following Bembo's lead he walked quietly toward the entrance at the end of the hall that was the main gate of the council house. The hunchback had reasoned quickly that the guards at the door, not having seen him enter, would take him and the Breton for Contarini's followers. Likewise, he knew that the aroused councilors would not be aware of the identity of the men who had been in the listening chamber.

So, playing both ends against the middle, he went to the gate, nodded to the pikeman on guard and emerged under the stars. As they did so they heard a distant shout from below and saw the servitors run to the head of the stairs up which they had come.

"They will bar the gate," whispered Bembo. "But, praise be to Saint Mark, we are outside the bars."

Michael noted with disgust that they were again on a landing with the canal in front of them. While they waited anxiously for a gondola to pass, a flurried councilor rushed through the door, glanced hastily at Bembo, and, recognizing him, glared at the dark canal.

"Did you see a man flee here hence, Bembo?" he questioned.

"Not yet, my lord," replied the hunchback truthfully. "But, if it please you, I will watch to observe when a man leaves the building."

When the councilor had reentered the hall, the great door was closed and barred. The two could hear the sounds of a hurried search within. They hailed the first empty craft that came abreast of the landing, and when they were fairly out of sight along the canal Bembo, who was curious by nature, turned to his new friend.

"What made you laugh, *signor?*"

Michael smiled reminiscently. "A splendid jest, my Bembo."

As he had listened to Clavijo's tale at the fête he had been struck by grave doubts as to its truth. The flowery descriptions of the Spaniard did not conform to Michael's knowledge of the Salt Sea and its tribes.

Furthermore, the man's face was vaguely familiar. Michael had a keen memory, but he could not place the man at first. Not until the testimony had been given before the council and Clavijo had been plainly disturbed did Michael remember him.

Then he recalled another frightened man. The scene on the shore at Nicopolis flashed before him, and he visioned a tall, stalwart

camp-follower of the Christian army driving a loaded cart headlong through the fugitives.

Clavijo had been that man. And the year of the battle of Nicopolis had been the year that Clavijo claimed to have been at the court of the Grand Cham of Tatary. Michael knew then what he suspected before, that the Spaniard had not been in the East. His tale had been a lie.

It was the decision of the council in taking Clavijo at his word that had struck Michael's grim sense of humor. It was, as he told Bembo, a rare jest.

VI

THE VENTURE

SAFE, for the nonce, in an odorous tavern hight the "Sign of the Sturgeon," on the docks of Rialto, Michael reflected the next day on what he had learned and fell to questioning Bembo, for there was much that puzzled him.

Bembo wondered somewhat, as he squatted on the table where their breakfast platter still lay, how Michael could obtain the money to pay for their quarters because it was becoming apparent to him that they did not have a silver *soldi* between them. When he mentioned respectfully that the landlord was chalking up their score behind the door and was growling for payment on account, Michael assured him that something would turn up to yield them gold.

Skeptical, but willing to believe in the good fortune of his new master—Bembo had attached himself to the Breton—the hunchback answered the questions.

"My lord Contarini must have money," he asserted, following the trend of his own thoughts. "His large establishments have impoverished him sorely and he is deep in debt to Rudolfo, the leader of his soldiers, who has waged Contarini's battles on the mainland. Methinks my lord can not pay——"

"And so has caught at the chance of riches wrung from Cathay," mused Michael. Egged on by his spendthrift mistress and his creditors, Contarini was planning to use his post as head of the Maritime Council to his own advantage.

This was more than probable because, while Contarini had aided Clavijo in spreading the tidings of a mythical kingdom beyond the Sarai Sea, he had been careful to have the council hear in secret the Spaniard's testimony as to the possible spoil to be gleaned from the Cathayans. So Contarini must believe the tale of Clavijo.

The Spaniard himself was merely posing as a voyager—an honorable figure in that age—and thriving on the gifts and hospitality of the Venetians. What of Rudolfo?

The *condottiere* had sought at all costs to keep Michael from hearing the tale of Clavijo. Why? Rudolfo must know of the coming venture into the East if he was in Contarini's confidence. He knew, too, that Michael had been on the border of the *terra incognita*.

What did Rudolfo fear that the Breton would disclose? Rudolfo's cowardice at the field of Nicopolis?

Michael shrugged, and dismissed the problem. It did not matter, he thought—and wrongly.

What interested him was Clavijo's magnificent lie. Michael knew that there was truth in the well from which the self-styled voyager had drawn his tales. Fra Odoric had spoken truly of a powerful Khan of Tatary.

But would the Khan of Tatary, of whom Michael had heard in the camp of Bayezid, prove to be actually the Cham of Cathay? Michael would have given much to know. For this khan was the one man Bayezid respected on the face of the earth.

"If I could know," he began, and looked at Bembo. "Fool o' mine, and withal, wise man, we must have more news. Go you to the plaza of the city and learn what you may of preparations being made for a ship to the East.

"Look you, wise fool," the Breton continued thoughtfully. "Is it not true that the natures of men will seek their proper end? Give a thief rope and he will halter himself; a miser will bleed others till there remains no blood in his own veins; a boaster will trip o'er his own tongue. I, being a wayfarer voyaging on behalf of five dead men, will see—the day of judgment, Bembo."

"And a fool, master?"

"Will be happy, God knows."

Now in saying this, Michael Bearn voiced the destiny that was to shape his own life and the fate of several others in one of the strangest adventures that was ever recorded in the annals of Venice.

Bembo found his master a queer mixture

of moodiness and cheer. Michael had astonished the jester by forcing him to share their meals in common. Bembo had always fared, before this, with the hunting-dogs of Contarini.

" 'Tis said," he ventured, thinking of the gold they must have to pay for their food, "that you have seen the battles of the pagans in the East. Could not you gain a place and honor as *condottiere* with one of the noble lords of Venice?"

"Would one of the noble lords employ a slave, Bembo?" Michael smiled at his companion's surprize. "Nay, there is no man's work in these mock wars of Italy where the *condottieri* bleed—their masters."

He looked out moodily at the forests of galley masts and emptied his flagon of wine.

"Being idlers, good Bembo, an enterprise must come to us. Go you into the city and learn if this venture is to be had—one wherein we may sharpen our wits and laugh mightily."

Bembo went. It was evening when he returned.

"So you have come back to me?" remarked Michael. "Are you not afraid of poverty and the dagger of Rudolfo? Bembo, if you had favor with a magician, what would you wish to be?"

The hunchback looked seriously at his torn finery.

"Saving my present service to you, my master, I would like to be the Grand Cham who wears a ruby on every toe and scatters gold as the monks scatter indulgences."

"So, has the Spaniard's gossip stirred your blood?"

"Master, it is truth. The council has commissioned Rudolfo to command the soldiery of the expedition to the land of the Grand Cham."

So suddenly did Michael Bearn spring up from his chair that wine and table were upset on Bembo, who fell back in alarm.

"No!" the Breton cried.

"Aye. They only await the selection of a proper mariner to go with Clavijo and those already chosen. Fifteen thousand ducats have been granted Messer Clavijo for funds. 'Tis said, despite his zeal to set eyes again upon the earthly paradise, he balked at taking the money for a space."

"Clavijo—Ruy de Gonzales Clavijo—goes verily to the Grand Cham!" Michael sat down on the bed and rocked with laughter. " 'Twould make the devil laugh. And who else goes?"

"A certain young count of the Mocenigo family—a rare gallant. Soranzi—I heard the thrifty merchant consulted his astrologer and found that his horoscope foretold rare things of him in Tatary. *Verbum sat sapienti*—a word to the wise is enough."

"Soranzi! Who else?"

"Nearly the whole of Venice has begged for the chance. Nevertheless, the wise council knows that the company must be limited to a few; five gentlemen and the men-at-arms."

"Perhaps the Cham would give him the freedom of the city—of Cathay, in the desert—the sandy desert!" Michael remarked seriously.

Bembo gaped and retreated to a corner of the room, fearing that his master might be afflicted with madness, until the reassuring thought came to him that Michael Bearn was only drunk.

"Aye, sir," he grinned amiably, "there is sand i' the desert——"

"Clavijo vouches for it, wise Bembo, and for the saltness of the sea."

"The salt—verily, sir—ha-ho!"

"Bembo." Michael shook his dark head gravely. " ark me, man; never will you behold such a voyager as Ruy Clavijo again. We will look no further, wait no longer. The wind is up, my fool, and we will sail with the tide. No quest could be more suited to our hearts than this."

He caught up his cloak, hat and sword and bowed ceremoniously to the jester.

"Behold, the new master mariner of Messer Clavijo and his party. I go to the council, or, better, to Contarini, for my commission."

Hereupon Bembo scratched his head and cast a tentative glance at the water jar. He had been eager to inform his master that Rudolfo was in the expedition, hoping to turn Michael from thought of meddling with Contarini's plans, and now Michael had said he would join the party.

"Let me bathe your head, master, before you go."

Michael laughed.

"Water, upon such a night as this! Nay, we will drink to our commission and to the Grand Cham. Come, most wise oracle, a toast!"

"To the Grand Cham." Bembo filled a cup reluctantly.

"To the Grand Sham!" Michael emptied the cup.

IT WAS late that night when he returned, but the jester was sitting up, wrapped in his tattered mantle, solemnly eying the diminishing candle on the table. He looked up fearfully when Michael pushed in the door, for Bembo had entertained grave apprehensions as to the reception of his slightly intoxicated master—for such he considered Michael—by the members of the council.

To his surprize Michael's step was regular and his glance steady.

"'Tis done, Bembo," he smiled. "Rudolfo being luckily absent, Contarini passed readily upon the merits of our claim. We sail the day after the morrow."

Michael flung himself into his chair and clapped Bembo on the knee.

"'Twas not wine that stirred my brain, Bembo. Knowing Clavijo, I had a grave fear that he would lead his expedition anywhere but to the *terra incognita*. Knowing Rudolfo, I am assured that the venture will verily seek spoil. And since our worthy friends would fain despoil the Cham, why, you and I must go with them. Because, forsooth, the Cham is of all men the man I most desire to clap eyes upon."

Taking some gold coins from a new pouch at his girdle, he bade Bembo settle their score at the Sign of the Sturgeon on the morrow. The pouch itself he detached and handed to Bembo, who was scratching his head, deeply puzzled by his master's speech.

"What is that, master?"

"For you. I drew an advance upon my pay. We part when the ship sails. This voyage is not for you, Bembo."

The jester pushed the money away and the corners of his lips drew down.

"Wherefore, master? Am I not your man?"

But Michael, glancing at the low partition that separated their room from the other chambers of the inn, shook his head thoughtfully.

"I have good reason for bidding you stay here. This voyage is not like other voyages."

Bembo pricked up his ears and protested, but Michael would say no more. Long after the sea-captain had retired to his cloak and bed of boards, the jester remained awake, watching the candle-flam emoodily and glancing from time to time angrily at the purse.

He was hurt and his curiosity was stirred—two strong emotions with the hunchback. As the candle spluttered and subsided into grease, Bembo reached out a claw-like hand and pouched the money.

In the annals of the Maritime Council, in the pages devoted to the voyages into *terra incognita*, it is recorded that of Messer Clavijo and his company only one man returned to Venice.

VII

THE CASTLE WITHOUT DOORS

CLAVIJO, in choosing the *Nauplia*, had selected the most comfortable means of travel to be had in those days. The pilgrim galliot was broad of beam and fitted with extra cabins in the stern castle. A dozen great sweeps aided the lateen sail. The sides of the vessel were high, and sloped well inboard—affording good protection against the waves.

The pilgrim galleys were designed to provide some ease for passengers. Live fowls were carried. The master of the ship could not remain at any given port for purposes of trade more than three days. He was also obliged to put in at any port they might fancy.

Clavijo, Mocenigo and Rudolfo had all quartered themselves aft; Soranzi had made shift with sleeping-space below decks. But Bearn, who had discovered for himself the unattractiveness of quarters under the deck where the passengers camped all over each other, appropriated space for his mantle and bundle on the main deck under the overhang of the bow.

He was somewhat surprized to see that the ship's captain was hugging the shore, keeping a course well within sight of land. "Coasting" it was called in those days. Since this was the popular route, favored by the passengers, it was more liable to attack by Moslem pirates than the more direct course out into the Ægean.

Pirate galleys frequented the sea lanes to the East, off Greece, and Michael had observed at a glance that the *Nauplia* was poorly equipped for defense. Moreover he wondered that Clavijo was not afraid of encountering thieves. The Spaniard had been entrusted with a treasure of some

fifteen thousand Venetian ducats and valuable goods.

It was the second night out and a full moon hung in a clear sky; the man at the steering-oar guided the *Nauplia* within sight of the shadows of land.

Near Michael groups of Armenian and Muscovite traders slept, men and women together, heedless of the clamor of voyagers at dice and wine, or the quarreling and singing below decks where torches of pine-pitch made sleep difficult, if not perilous.

Michael found that he missed Bembo's light tongue and deeper philosophy. The jester would have been in his element on such a night. But Bembo had left him without farewell the day before the galliot sailed.

The tumult and lights of the pilgrim ship formed a great contrast to the silence and speed of a smaller galley that swept out of an inlet with oars plying on either side and spray flashing in the moonlight.

For a second Michael studied it, then took up his sword and ran aft to where the captain slept by the helmsman.

"Look at yonder craft," observed the Breton, shaking the slumbering seaman, "and then dream if you can."

The Venetian stumbled to his feet, gazed, and swore roundly.

"Saint Anthony of Padua! I like it not."

He strode to the break of the stern castle.

"Ho, there! Cressets! Women into the stern! Out with your swords, *messers*. There be pirates at hand or I am a blind man!"

The gamesters sprang up. Men of the crew ran to fix torches in place at the ship's side; fagots contained in steel baskets were kindled at bow and stern. The women, wailing and crying, were driven below decks.

"Captain," suggested Michael, "it would be well to man the sweeps and get the galliot well under weigh. Your sloping sides are comfortably devised for boarders. Our safety lies in ramming the galley with our wooden beak, such as it is."

The Venetian, experienced in such matters, saw the wisdom of this and was giving orders for the rowers to push out the great oars, when a tall figure appeared on the balcony below the steering-platform and silenced him.

"Nay. No time for that. Summon up your oarsmen to fight on deck."

Michael, leaning down, saw that it was Rudolfo who spoke. The *condottiere* had drawn his sword and was giving swift instructions to his own men who tumbled up, pulling mail hoods about their heads and stringing their bows.

"You hear me, fool!" Rudolfo cried at the Venetian. "I am in command of the armed forces of this cursed galliot. By the rood——"

The captain shrugged, glanced at the oncoming galley—now not a dozen ships' lengths away—and complied. The crew hurried to the danger point at the ship's side, shepherded by Rudolfo, while the *Nauplia* barely moved through the water, for the wind was light.

Young Mocenigo reeled upon deck, more than a little the worse for wine. Michael saw Soranzi peer from a cabin and straightway vanish.

The brazen sound of the ship's bell voiced a warning to all who still slept. From the dark huddle of Muscovites and Armenians emerged men with bows—Oriental traders, well able to fight in a crisis. On the waist of the *Nauplia* tumult reigned.

Glancing up at the sail, the Venetian skipper whispered to Michael: "Let the gallants do as they please. By Saint Anthony, I'll keep our bow against the other craft."

Michael took his stand beside Rudolfo. The *condottiere* was a brilliant figure in the ruddy light of the torches, his silver-inlaid helmet glittering, his crimson mantle flung back from his mailed chest. He ceased his directions to his men long enough to look swiftly at the Breton and his teeth shone at his beard.

"By the rood, *messer*, you stand behind me? I see you love not the front line of battle."

Now Michael wore no armor under his jerkin and mere prudence had dictated that he shelter himself behind the high rail as long as possible to escape the first arrow flights of the pirates, until they should board.

"As you wish, *signor*."

He pulled himself up into one of the platforms fashioned for archers to stand on. Rudolfo moved slightly away and Michael smiled at the inbred suspicion that took the *condottiere* beyond his reach.

But the arrows from the galley rattled high against the mast and tore through the great square of the sail that bellied and flapped as the Venetian skipper came about to present his bow to the pirate craft.

Rudolfo's half-dozen archers plied their long bows with disciplined precision.

"Saint Mark and Rudolfo!" Their shout went over the water to the galley. Answering cries identified the attackers as Turks and Greeks.

"Dogs!" snarled young Mocenigo. "The Lion of Saint Mark! Ha—do you like his claws?"

He seized one of the cressets by its supports and cast it out upon the deck of the galley as that craft moved past—the maneuver of the Venetian skipper having kept the galley from striking the side of the pilgrim ship with its bow.

For a moment there was a pandemonium of shouts, cries of anger and pain and the flicker of javelins and arrows. The archers of Rudolfo, bearing long leather shields in front of them on their left arms, escaped injury, but Michael saw a pilgrim or two fall writhing to the deck.

Then the galley was past its prey and turning slowly—one bank of oars plying.

"*Pandol*" called the *Nauplia's* skipper. "About!" He pushed the two steering-sweeps over and the galliot swung slowly into the offshore tack on which it had been when the pirates were sighted.

Only one more attempt the galley made to close, and the motley defenders of the pilgrim ship were lining the other rail when something whizzed past Michael from behind and stuck into the wooden planking between him and Rudolfo.

The Breton glanced around and saw only the confusion of undisciplined men taking up new positions. Then he drew the knife from the rail.

"A pretty present," laughed the *condottiere*. "For you or me?"

THE knife was a long, heavy blade, its bronze hilt richly inlaid with silver. Michael thrust it into his belt and observed that the galley was drawing off, followed by the taunting shouts of the Venetians.

"They have small stomach for a fight," he muttered.

"Thanks to God and our good friend Pietro Rudolfo." Clavijo's bull voice filled the ship. "Come, Master Bearn, I do not see that you were any too forward in the affray. Doubtless your skin is tender and you hang back lest it be pricked."

Now Michael had not seen Clavijo at all along the embattled rail of the galliot and he strongly suspected that the man had remained in his cabin until the pirates had drawn off. Then a stronger suspicion assailed him, and he touched the knife in his girdle.

"Aye," he assented seriously, "the skin is very tender—upon my back, and this poniard is both heavy and sharp. It was cast at me from behind."

He held it up by the point before the eyes of the Spaniard, who blinked and pulled at his long beard. Rudolfo took it, glanced it over, looked searchingly at Clavijo from under his thick brows and tossed it over the side of the vessel.

"Some sailor's blade," he shrugged, "and doubtless meant for my kidneys. I am not overpopular with the seamen of the *Nauplia*, because, verily, I enforce discipline upon occasion."

It was a long speech for the taciturn *condottiere* to make. Michael would have chosen to keep the dagger, in hopes of learning who its owner was. Yet, as Rudolfo said, it might well have been intended for him.

"Hark ye, Messer Clavijo." The Breton folded his arms. "Neither master of this vessel nor leader of your men-at-arms am I. The Maritime Council engaged me to aid you to navigate unknown waters if need be, and to arrange transport upon land. This will I do, so well as I may. Methinks the time may come when you will have need of my services."

He was looking at Clavijo, but Rudolfo spoke.

"As a slave, Master Bearn? It is said that you sleep alone in your cloak, so that no other may see the marks of a whip upon your shoulders."

So saying, he stepped back, laying hand lightly on the hilt of his sword. Michael Bearn drew a long breath, but his left hand —that Rudolfo, having learned his lesson once, was watching—reached up to the clasp of his mantle instead of to his weapon.

The cloak fell to the deck, and Michael's muscular fingers ripped open the collar of his jerkin, drawing it down over his bare shoulder. Both Clavijo and Rudolfo saw the deep red welt of scars.

"Aye," nodded Michael, "there be the marks of a Turkish scourge."

At this Clavijo started and a curiously intent frown passed over his smooth brow. He eyed the Breton's square, hard face and

wiry, gray-black hair as if seeing him for the first time.

"Moreover," went on Michael tranquilly, "*signori*, you will note that my right arm hangs useless. It was broken by those same servants of the sultan. Perhaps this is why I have no longer any love for fighting when there is no need——"

"But surely, Master Bearn," smiled Calvijo ironically, "there was need to repel these pirates, who would have made short matter of us otherwise."

MICHAEL laughed. The attack by the small galley had had in it more bark than bite, and once it was clear to their enemies that the pilgrim ship was not to be surprized, the Turks and Greeks seemed to lose heart. Such an affair bore little resemblance to the grim struggles Michael Bearn had shared in, along the frontier of the Orient.

"You laugh, *signor?*" Rudolfo's voice was heavy with insult. "Perhaps you would relish another scourging?"

The dark blood flooded into the young Breton's face. Around the three a circle of Rudolfo's men and sailors had gathered, scenting a quarrel. The gleam of torches lighted the scene. He wondered if the others had expected the *condottiere* to challenge him.

Rudolfo was not the man to be forced into a fight that he had not anticipated beforehand.

And then Michael heard an exclamation from one of the seamen. A strange whirring filled the air. Shrill squawking resounded on all sides.

One of the torches was knocked to the deck by a fluttering, animated ball that leaped and bounded among the men. The deck of the *Nauplia* in a moment was full of poultry. Hens, roosters, ducks and guinea fowl dashed about underfoot and overhead.

"Ten thousand devils!" Rudolfo struck viciously at a fat pullet that collided with his face. The spectators, the tensity of the quarrel broken in a flash, started running about, clutching at the flying meat.

It was each man for himself and the best dinner to the quickest. The torches were soon darting into every quarter of the deck, leaving Michael in semi-darkness. Clavijo was leading the angry Rudolfo away.

A grotesque figure rose from the deck at Michael's elbow—a misshapen, stained and grimacing form clad in striped raiment.

"Master," cried Bembo, "the field is mine. My light cavalry, released by a purloined key from their storage prison, have scattered our foes. Come, good master, let us make good our retreat!"

In the shadows of the bow Michael sat down on his bundle and laughed, more than a little provoked.

"A fair night, cousin mine," chattered the jester, taking this as a good omen. "Give me thanks for carrying you bodily away from the demons o' the sea. Black Rudolfo would ha' cast you overside as easily as I could suck an egg. Marry—the sight of eggs turns my belly for I lived upon them, hidden in the hold with the fowls for three days and two nights. Then, not an hour since I was awakened by a shouting as of the foul fiend, whereupon the roosters crowed, thinking it was day. Master, a soldier crawled into my castle, in the dark, and I thought the pirates held the ship and I was to be ripped open without the services of a confessor. *Pompa mortis!* Oh, the trappings of death!"

Bembo shivered and looked around anxiously at the tranquil moonlit sea.

"But, forsooth, the big soldier thrust his thatch through the window of the hold and bawled to the other vessel to stand off, that the plan had been changed, and it was useless to attack the galliot. A brave lad, thought I, to bid the pirates mend their ways and be gone. Verily he was a potent bully, for the miscreants gave back and left us in peace. So I—being sorely athirst from fear and hen's feathers and bad eggs—I climbed to the roof o' this house and saw Rudolfo about to spit you, whereupon I ran back for my winged allies."

"Was the man you saw in armor?"

"Armor, quoth 'a, verily so. When his face was i' the window I saw a steel cap as big as a bucket. Master, chide me not for coming. Nay, no voyage that was ever brewed could make me leave the good man who shared his wine and meat wi' me; nor would my curiosity leave me in peace until I learned wherein this voyage differed from other voyages, as you said."

Michael arranged his pack for a pillow and laid his sword close to his left hand. The jester blinked at him from shrewd little eyes, the great head turned to one side, like a dog's, questioningly.

"A ship, Bembo," murmured the Breton, his eyes closed, "a harmless pilgrim galliot, beats off an attack by well-armed raiders because—a soldier calls secretly to the foe from below decks. One of Rudolfo's men. A dagger is thrown from behind the mast. Feed your curiosity with that and let me sleep."

IT WAS a leaner and dirtier throng that lined the rail of the *Nauplia* when that good galliot entered the dark waters of the Golden Horn and anchored off the crowded shore of Constantinople after the storms of the Ægean that followed the attack by the pirates.

And when Clavijo and his party reembarked for Pera and the Black Sea in a small Venetian trading-galley, Mocenigo was no longer with them. The young count, Clavijo explained to Bearn, had found paradise enough in the Hippodrome and palaces of the emperor, and women to his liking. The departure of the others had been hurried by the insults of Moslem warriors who thronged the water-front.

Michael said nothing but sought out Bembo, who was sitting on a chest on the jetty, eying the preparations for departure.

"The first of us has fallen by the wayside, Bembo," he observed gravely. He had been apprehensive about the jester since Bembo bobbed up as a stowaway, but had not reproved him. "Will you not follow his example and remain here?"

"I would see the Grand Cham."

Michael looked at him and laughed.

"You will never see the Grand Cham."

"Well—" Bembo was surprized— "you must know, master, for you have traveled near Cathay. I would see the city and the gold palaces——"

"There is no city."

"Master? You have heard Clav——"

"Clavijo—" Michael's smile broadened into a wide grin— "Messer Ruy de Gonzales Clavijo is the greatest liar in Christendom."

Bembo gaped and glanced from the ship to the stores on the jetty and at the Breton as if doubting his senses.

"Clavijo, my good Bembo, is a man with one talent. Aye—a tongue. The sun never shone upon a greater liar. What he did not pick up at the water-front of Genoa and Venice he heard related of the traveling monks. When that failed him he had his tongue, and wit to match. It made his fortune in Venice. Until the council took him at his own value, forsooth, and sent him to find the city that is a lie."

Michael chuckled at the memory. "When Clavijo by his own testimony was in Cathay I saw him among a throng of camp-followers, fleeing along the Danube."

At this Bembo scratched his head vigorously. Then his eyes lighted and he leaped from the chest.

"Aye, master. Well, then, since this is a quest of folly, who should be the leader but a fool?"

When the galley cleared the Horn Bembo stood beside the helmsman, a wooden sword stuck in his ragged girdle, his twisted legs planted wide, and his bearing as important as that of an admiral of the Venetian fleet.

And when, a month later, the party of explorers rode inland from Trebizond, Bembo took his place at the head of the column, mounted on a caparisoned mule.

"On, into *terra incognita!*" he cried, waving his wooden sword valiantly.

In fact Trebixond was the boundary of what we now call Europe. It was the eastern door of the fading Byzantine Empire, the last trade port of the Serene Republic of Venice, which had its *bailio* stationed in an arsenal on shore. The walled city, rising on rocks from this shore, was the home of Manuel the Second, almost the last of the Comneni line—emperors of Trebizond for generations.

Now they were bound, as Bembo had stated, into unknown territory—into blank spaces on Venetian maps. No one in Trebizond had been anxious to accompany them for it was known that the mountains to the south and east as far as the Salt Sea were occupied by tribes who paid tribute to a monarch of Tatary.

Soranzi and others of the party had taken this information as a good augury and were in high spirits. So also was Bembo.

"Come, my flock!" He jangled the bells on his hood. "Follow your bell-wether. Ply your spurs, sound the timbrels! A fool is your leader, and folly your guide. Ride, my cousins in folly, and —— take him who first draws rein!"

Journeying to the southeast, they entered bare brown plains and passes that wound among stunted, rocky hills where the valleys were yet snow-coated and the air was chill. For the first time the voyagers were alone in a strange land. And

stranger than the aspect of the country where isolated shepherds ran away at their approach and the inns were no more than walled spaces, where the animals could be picketed and fires lighted—stranger than this was the castle without doors.

The highway they had been following was no more than a trail from valley to valley. The castle overlooked this path from a barren cliffside up which wound a well-defined way cut in the rock.

Half-way up the ramp, as the travelers termed the road, they were halted by a ragged man on a shaggy pony who called to them harshly. Clavijo appeared to meditate on the meaning of the horseman's words, then shook his head. Michael, however, interpreted.

"The man is an Armenian. He says we are in the land of his lord and must pay the customary tribute. It would be best to do so."

Soranzi, who handled the expenditures of the expedition, demurred, and the rider retired, bidding them stay where they were. Presently a thin man clad in leathers and furs appeared in the roadway, followed by thirty or more even more ragged horsemen armed with bows.

At this Rudolfo swore and began to muster his mailed men-at-arms to the front of the column, when Michael checked him.

"This rider declares that he is lord of the castle, although he does not dare occupy it owing to the attacks of the Turks who are in the habit of raiding the country from the sultanate to the south. He says that he is very poor and a Christian—which, forsooth, is but half true—and needs money to carry on his fighting. What will you give him, Messer Soranzi?"

The merchant scowled, for besides the presents destined for the Grand Cham the only other goods in the caravan were his own large stock in trade from which he expected a profit of several hundred per cent. at the least.

"Tell the Moor," he commanded, "that we be merchants seeking the court of the Grand Cham. Travelers do not pay tribute at castles of the Grand Cham."

Michael grinned and spoke with the Armenian chief, who frowned in turn and responded testily.

"He says," announced the Breton, "that he knows naught of any Grand Cham or Khan except himself and the Turkish sultans and that if we are to travel in his land we must make him a present."

Clavijo and Soranzi argued the matter hotly and finally produced a piece of scarlet cloth and a silver cup. These the Armenian refused angrily, saying that he must have more.

Darkness was falling and a thin rain pierced the garments of the travelers uncomfortably. Soranzi shook his thin fists and chewed at his beard.

"And this dog calls himself a Christian! Well, give him a roll of Phrygian purple velvet from the lot we carry for the great Cham——"

"And a handful of gold from your own fat pouch, Messer Merchant," snarled Rudolfo, who was both cold and hungry. "A pox on your bartering!"

This brought a wail from Soranzi, but mollified the Armenian, who withdrew up the hillside with his motley army and his spoils. But the Venetians found that the horsemen had not remained at the castle. It was quite empty; moreover every door had been removed from its hinges.

When the beasts had been quartered in the courtyard and Michael with some of the soldiers had succeeded in lighting a fire in the great hall—not without difficulty—and after they had dined on cold mutton, cold bread-cakes and wine, Clavijo, who had been very thoughtful for some time, spoke up—

"My friends, look yonder."

RUDOLFO started nervously and they all stared at a sign on the stone wall of the hall, a cross, obscured by smoke, chiseled into the granite.

"That is a potent symbol of the Cathayans," nodded Clavijo, "one of the talismans of their alchemists. Aye, this castle bears evidence of their magic. Why is there no castellan? Where be the doors?"

As the men were silent, the snarling cry of a jackal came to their ears from the darkness and rain outside and Soranzi paled.

"Where vanished the knavish riders that we met?" continued Clavijo.

"To their tents, elsewhere," broke in Michael. "As for the cross, it is Christian in sooth. The doors were doubtless removed by the Turks who, the Armenian said, recently sacked the place and left orders that it was not to be defended again."

Clavijo shrugged, with a dubious smile. Since learning that Bearn had been a captive

of the Moors, as he chose to call them, he had been careful to avoid discussion with the Breton.

"As you wish. But soon we will come upon the piles of human skulls. I suppose you would say there is no danger there." He shook his head in gentle reproof. "Now, sirs, I have a plan. Messer Soranzi seeks to avoid robbery. Methinks you all would fain live longer. So be it. I, who have mastered the dangers of the mountains and the sands and the Cathayans, I will go ahead from here alone."

Michael glanced at him searchingly and was silent.

"You will be safe here, sirs," continued the Spaniard, "under the potent protection of Rudolfo and his men. I have no fear. What I have done once can be accomplished again. Even though I *never return*, I would prefer to press on from here alone. A score of swords and halberds will avail us little against the Cathayans. Better one should die than all."

"If I am not back by the first of Winter, sirs, you can retrace your steps easily to Trebizond. By tying the mules, head to tail, in a fashion I wot well of, I can make shift to bear with me the gifts for the Grand Cham, placed in packs upon the mules."

Rudolfo, however, voiced a blunt negative.

"By the rood, sir, we have made a bond between us. We will go in a body or not at all."

This view was shared by Soranzi, who, despite privations and plundering, had hugged to his bosom the dream of fabulous profits promised him by his astrologer in Venice.

"Aye," put in Bembo seriously; "we will go in our bodies or not at all."

"I would fain see the bull-stag that you say is to be met with in Cathay," insisted Michael.

"A most curious beast, Master Bearn," observed Clavijo mechanically. "It has more hairs on its tail than a lion in its mane.* The pagans in Cathay entrap the beast by setting a snare artfully between two trees so that when the *taurus*—which is the name bestowed upon it by Herodotus—passes between the trees, its tail is caught fast. So tender is the beast of its fine tail that it remains passive lest a hair be pulled out, when the Cathayans may easily make it prisoner."

"Yet, *signor*," added Michael, "they must take care in freeing it, for if they should sever the tail from the body by stroke of sword, the bull-stag would perceive that its valued member was lost beyond repair and would no longer feel constrained to quietude. I fear that many imprudent Cathayans have died unshriven because they cut off the tail of a *taurus*."

Clavijo pulled at his beard—a habit when he was dubious.

"Most true, Master Bearn. Only one such as I who have knowledge of the wiles of the Cathayan beasts may cope with them. I remember a mighty serpent that I set out to slay. I found the serpent engaged in a monstrous struggle with a dragon before its cave."

"Saint Bacchus preserve us!" Bembo glanced fearfully at the shadows in the corners of the damp, leaf-strewn hall. Several of the men-at-arms who were listening from their fire drew nearer and gaped.

"The dragon is the mightiest monster of Cathay," resumed Clavijo more readily. "It has a lance at the end of its armored tail that can strike through the stoutest mail. *Signori*, I carefully avoided the sweep of the deadly tail and waited. As God willed, the dragon seized the serpent by the head. Both pulled mightily, and when their necks were taut I stepped nearer and smote with my sword, severing the Medusa-like head of the dragon from its shoulders."

"Well struck!" approved Michael. "And the serpent?"

"Alas, that was a most fearsome beast. For days I awaited an opportunity to slay it. Before long it transpired that the foul beast came from its lair to attack a passing lion. Verily, *signori*, it twined about the king of beasts and swallowed its victim hindquarters first. Forsooth, that was my chance. Rushing forward, I swung my sword upon its neck as it lay sluggish. When the head of the serpent fell to earth the head of the lion fell off with that of its conqueror, and I rode back with double booty to the city of the Cham."

Michael was rolling himself in his cloak on a table for the night when Bembo approached.

"Master," whispered the jester, "verily just now I looked without the castle and saw two spirits."

"Bah! Your own fears you saw."

"Nay, they had two great heads. Gian,

* Clavijo had heard of the Central Asian yak.

the big lieutenant of Rudolfo, was with me and we both said a *pater noster*. Then Gian, being a braver man than I and somewhat the better for wine, crept closer and cast his knife at one of the two. Whereupon they disappeared."

This incident Michael did not permit to disturb his slumbers. He, as well as Clavijo, had noticed that the Armenians—the chief of Cabasica, the castle without doors—had left riders to spy upon them. The turbans of the watchers had served, doubtless, to make Clavijo exaggerate the size of their heads.

He was well aware that the Spaniard was caught between two fires. Beheading was the penalty that the Maritime Council would inflict on Clavijo if his deceit were discovered and Venetian officials should lay hand on him. So, Michael reasoned, Clavijo, possibly through Rudolfo's agency, had arranged for the mock attack by the pirates on the *Nauplia*, hoping to be taken prisoner and robbed by friendly hands.

But the galliot, owing to Michael's warning and the skill of the Venetian captain, had been able to offer unexpected resistance. Clavijo, if he had thought to have himself and his companions captured by a convenient foe, had been disappointed.

Mocenigo, a well-known Venetian and hence dangerous to Clavijo, had been persuaded, not with great difficulty, to fall behind at Constantinople. And the life of Michael—another dangerous member—had been attempted during the sham attack on the galliot. This puzzled the Breton more than a little, because he did not think that Clavijo was the type to turn so quickly to assassination.

Thinking over the situation drowsily, Michael remembered that Bembo had just said something about a man who cast a knife. What knife? Rudolfo had thrown the silver-chased weapon into the sea! Rudolfo—a knife. . . .

Hereupon Michael slumbered fitfully, dreaming that Clavijo had taken the form of a dragon with a man's head and that flames and smoke were spouting from his nostrils. He imagined that he was bound and helpless and the monster that was Clavijo came nearer until the flames touched his face. . . .

At this point Michael jerked into wakefulness and perceived that Bembo had heaped fresh brush on the fire which had blazed up near by. Soranzi, his cloak wrapped closely about him, sat hunched by the flames, shivering and grunting in his sleep, looking for all the world like an old and dingy vulture with an overlarge belly and bald head.

Rudolfo and Gian were standing, fully clad, in a corner of the hall and both were looking at him.

Sleep had refreshed Michael's brain. It struck him that Gian had been the man who cast the knife at him.

For the remainder of the night Michael kept awake.

VIII

THE SITTING-DOWN BEAST

MESSER RUY DE GONZALES CLAVIJO was a man of many cares. His expedition made slow and weary progress among the mountain-passes, guides could not be hired, food was scanty, hardships many. Yet they advanced to the south all too quickly for him.

For he could not turn back. Soranzi and Rudolfo and Michael Bearn would not hear of it. Nor could he confess that he did not know where he was going.

Once he tried losing his way. But Michael promptly rode ahead through the rain and found a fresh trail of many horses going in their direction. This new route took them out of the rocky hillocks down into more fertile fields.

"A fairer country," announced Michael, as the rain cleared, "with vineyards and date groves. On, to the Grand Cham!"

Looking back, Clavijo beheld a majestic summit, snow-crowned, with bare slopes rising to the height of the Alps.

"The Holy Mount Ararat," he said bravely, and crossed himself. "Forward, *signori*—if you have heart to face the dangers that beset that other mountain of skulls."

Their followers were not overeager. Some of the few servants were sick. Rudolfo's men-at-arms, accustomed to the machine-like wars of Italy, where an army marched but a league a day and where every hillside had its village and food and women, and the peasants had to bear the burden of both armies—Rudolfo's men muttered and sulked, except the lieutenant Gian.

Some whispered that the party was followed, that the spirits of the castle kept at their heels. Others pointed to distant bands

of horsemen on the plain, bands that Clavijo declared were Moors and pagans and Michael asserted to be Turks.

One night Gian and several men stole away, to rifle houses in a village. They returned with poor spoil but many tales. Bembo, who had slipped off to accompany them, stoutly asserted that he had beheld a monster walking among the houses of the Moors or Saracens or whatever the heathens might be.

He thought at first the animal had been sitting down, until it had moved off at the approach of the men.

"*Signori*," he protested, "it was still sitting down, yet it ran. It had the body of a horse, spotted like a snake, the legs of a deer and the head of a stag. And its neck! Beshrew me, *signori*, may I never eat pudding again if its neck did not rise up from its body like Gian's spear when he lances an apple from a peasant's tree. Nay, it was as tall as the mast of a ship, for the monster stopped and smelled of fruit over a garden wall that was too high for us to climb."

Bembo had seen a giraffe.

This interested Michael, for he had never heard of such animals in Asia Minor.

After this inroad upon the inhabitants, the Venetians were shunned more than ever. A hot sun beat upon their heavy garments. The road they followed was no more than a track of deep mud.

Clavijo was very unhappy. For, in spite of his brave tale, he had never before been farther east than Constantinople. And the last thing he wished was to return, a prisoner, into the Venetian power that stretched even to Trebizond.

And then came the night when, encamped at a short distance from the road, they were awakened during the last hour of darkness by the rushing sound of horses' hoofs passing by along the road.

They saw nothing of the riders, only heard the horses sweeping past with incredible speed. Clavijo wondered fearfully what kind of men could ride at that pace in the darkness.

Dawn revealed the bodies of three of his servants, their throats cut, lying by the ashes of the camp-fire.

"It was the spirits of the waste!" cried Soranzi. "We must hasten; we are near the city in the sands."

The merchant pointed to thin traces of sand in the earth. But when they looked for footprints of the assassins approaching their camp they found nothing. Nothing, that is, except the hoof-marks that were quite fresh in the road near by. Michael, however, knew that Gian's excursion into the village had brought the pursuers upon their tracks.

Clavijo was more than a little superstitious. He fancied that the fantoms he had summoned up by his words had pursued their steps. The spirits that he had invoked had taken form. In his tale he had said that his servants met death.

"Hasten!" he cried. "Away from here!"

The three bodies were buried in a shallow grave. There were now only eight attendants—Bembo, a sick servant of Clavijo who was carried in a litter, Gian and his four men and Soranzi's servant.

When the pack-animals were loaded and trudging forward, Michael reined his horse in beside the Spaniard.

"Signor Clavijo," he said softly. "You have left the path that we were following. By the sun, unless I am blind, you are taking us in a circle. Wherefore?"

The Spaniard pointed toward the site of the distant camp.

"Death is upon us. We are in the land of Gog and Magog, where *djins* pursue Christian travelers. Oh, it is an evil day!"

"Do *djins* cast a dagger, a heavy poniard, with bronze hilt overlaid in silver, at a Christian's back? On shipboard?"

The black eyes of Clavijo widened.

"Nay, forsooth! You describe the dagger once owned by Gian. I have not seen it since——"

"Rudolfo, your friend, threw it into the sea. Come, *signor*, here is need of truth."

"As God is my witness, I have spoken the truth."

"About Cathay? And the Grand Cham?"

Clavijo was silent, sullen almost.

"*Signor*, the death of your men ends all buffoonery. You were their master——"

"*Por Dios!*" Clavijo's full face went livid. "Do you suspect me of that? I did not do it. Nor do I know aught of the dagger cast at you."

Michael glanced at him thoughtfully. "Then confess to me, *signor*, that you never saw the court of the Grand Cham."

"Master Bearn—" Clavijo started, and drew a long breath. "You heard what I told the council. Have you not believed?

Have you not seen the holy Mount Ararat and heard Bembo relate the aspect of the strange beast of"—he lifted his head stubbornly—"Cathay?"

Michael laughed shortly. "Faith, *signor*, it would take a magician of Cathay himself to tell what is true and what is false." He checked the other's exclamation. "Nay, listen. I have sounded the bottom of your tale. You were in Constantinople, not Cathay. Your wonders were garbled stories of travelers picked up on the jetties and in the markets. Your city—an illusion of the sands that some call by a strange name—a mirage. Your tower of skulls—a heap of stones."

"The Grand Cham——"

"Of him will we soon learn."

Claviijo shrugged.

"You heard the emperor at Trebizond speak of a great Tatar king."

At this Michael smiled.

"Man, you are wonderful. You pulled wool over the sharp eyes of the *Signory*, and beguiled two emperors. It has been a rare jest, this voyage. I could love you for that. Nay, I can not think that you wished to stick me in the back, or to slay those poor fools."

He nodded thoughtfully.

"If a man's child could tell when you lied and when not, I would be your friend, Gonzales. This much I will do for you. You can not turn back. Soranzi's greed is fired by the strange sights he has seen and yearns for his promised profits. Rudolfo will not give in to you, unless he is in your confidence——"

"God forbid!"

"That had the ring of truth. Well, by my reckoning we are near the Tatar tribes. Now that death dogs our steps we can not push on blindly. We are followed, without doubt. I shall strike back along our track and seek to take captive one of the riders, whether Armenian or *djin*, and make him tell us where we are and what is in store for us and why we are followed. Do you call a halt to rest the beasts and await my coming. Do you agree?"

Clavijo chewed his beard, and flushed.

"As you will, Master Bearn. We will wait."

IT IS more than possible if Michael Bearn could have had his way that Clavijo and those with him, who were yet alive and well, might have returned in safety to Trebizond.

The Breton was barely gone, however, when events took another turn. Rudolfo had been more silent than his wont that morning and now he dismounted, nodded to Gian, and strode to Clavijo's side.

"*Signor*, your sword and dagger."

The Spaniard drew back, surprized. Whereupon Rudolfo reached out and secured the weapons for himself without trouble. Gian and another soldier took spear and poniard from Soranzi's servant. Seeing this, Rudolfo turned to the merchant, who was armed only with a knife.

"Messer Soranzi, an unpleasant duty has fallen upon me. Since leaving Venice I have suspected this Spaniard of deceit. By the Rood, it is plain that he knows not the way he follows. Just now he has doubled on his tracks. I think his tale was but a pretext to get money from the honorable council."

Soranzi's little eyes narrowed and his thin face darkened. He cast a venomous look at the unhappy Spaniard.

"Witness, Messer Soranzi," continued the *condottiere*, "that this deceiver can not speak the language of the country he claims to have traveled. He would have left us at Cabasica and taken the Cham's presents with him."

Conviction leaped into the twisted face of the merchant and he shook with rage.

"The man's face declares you have the right of it," he hissed. "What can we do?"

"This. I am the leader of the men-at-arms. I take command, forsooth! Every man except the five troopers and myself must give up arms. You, Soranzi, assume charge of the money, articles of trade and gifts. Take an inventory of the goods, and keep it. The —— himself knows in what quarter this liar has led us. We will strike back to Trebizond and consult further—Ha, dog! Would you do that?"

The roving eye of the *condottiere* had fallen upon Bembo as the hunchback was stealing away quietly in the direction Michael had taken along the back track. Rudolfo spurred after him and struck the jester into the mud with his mailed fist, leaning down from the saddle to glare at him.

Bembo rose, drew his wooden sword from his girdle with a flourish and handed it to Rudolfo.

"You have overcome me, *vi et armis*. Take my sword."

Rudolfo's answer was to cast the thing

away contemptuously; nevertheless he kept a wary glance on the jester.

"We will wait for Master Bearn," he said shortly. "When he returns he must answer on the spot for the death of the three varlets."

Now Bembo would have given a leg to be able to run off and acquaint his friend with what had happened. The fool, like most unfortunates who are crippled in body, was sensitive to impressions.

He was afraid of Rudolfo, and more afraid of Gian. He looked upon Michael as his sole protector and Michael would presently walk back, armed only with a sword, to where his enemy waited with a half-dozen men-at-arms.

These same men were alert and eager, pleased at the chance of reaching Trebizond again. Bembo noticed that they did not seem surprized at the turn in affairs, and that Gian was a-grin.

"Saint Bacchus aid me and keep good Cousin Michael away," he prayed. "Or our guts are in the saucepan!"

They had not long to wait. Michael stepped from between two trees against which the men-at-arms were sitting at the road's edge. He had come through the dense thorn thicket without a sound.

Rudolfo and Soranzi were not a little disturbed by this sudden apparition in their midst of the man for whom they were looking down the road. The captain of mercenaries glanced at the thicket and saw that half-hidden within it was a queer kind of native shrine—a mere heap of stones with rags stuck upon sticks hanging over it.

Soranzi tried to read the Breton's harsh face—a task that was no longer easy. Michael's brown eyes were half-closed and the merchant noted that he worked the fingers of his right hand slowly as if testing long unused muscles.

"*Signor*," said Michael to Rudolfo, "I heard, while I was coming through yonder thicket, some words of yours. You made bold, methinks, to say that I slew the three varlets. Is it not so?"

Michael glanced around the ring of faces that had gathered close to him. The men-at-arms were gaping, fingering their weapons, intent on Rudolfo. It was significant of the natures of the leaders that Michael seemed, for the moment at least, to enjoy the mastery of the situation.

His dark face was lighted by a kind of inward amusement, while Rudolfo was pulling at his mustache with lowered eyes. The watching attendants ignored Soranzi and Clavijo, knowing that the test of leadership lay between the Breton and their own captain.

"And reason enow!" said the latter curtly. "'Fore ——, masters, here have we a low-born churl who stinks of the sea and who bears the scars of slavery on his wrists and back. Since our landing he has held intercourse with the pagans of the countryside. Aye, did he not interfere on behalf of the knavish robbers of Cabasica? And warn my good Gian from his excursion into the native village some time since? What more of reason would you have?"

This arraignment, although it satisfied the servitors, raised grave doubts in the keen mind of Soranzi—doubts which were heightened when Michael responded gravely that he had slept in a tent with Clavijo the night before and that the Spaniard could testify that he had not left the tent until aroused by the others.

"Yet," growled Rudolfo, who was gaining confidence, "you can walk out of a wood without a sound. Why can you not move even more silently in the hours of darkness when the evil powers are strong? There is black magic in the air, by the rood! How else could riders gallop like the wind—as those we heard anon—when an honest Christian can not see where to put his foot to earth?"

"Master Bearn speaks the truth," broke in Clavijo bluntly, "and—my head on it—he is an honest Christian."

"You are not lacking in lies," growled Rudolfo. "We may no longer believe you. Moreover, by the mouth of his friend Bembo, the Breton stands accused."

Michael glanced at the hunchback keenly. He would have staked his life on the fool's faith. The tie between the two had been strengthened by the hardships of the journey.

In fact it was pity for the hunchback that had impelled Michael to join the party again. He had been approaching them through the thicket, moving silently as was his custom, when Rudolfo's loudly spoken threats arrested him.

Understanding that the *condottiere* had taken the leadership of the party from Clavijo, and that the Italian's first blow would be against himself, Michael had been

strongly inclined to part company with the others and strike for the Tatar country that he knew could not be far from here.

Thus far the course of the voyagers had fitted in with the plans of Michael, who was anxious to appear before the khan as an accredited representative of a European power, with the gifts that experience had taught him were needful in gaining the friendship of an Oriental monarch.

More than once he had steered Clavijo to the west, away from the south where bands of Turkish irregulars were thick. Michael had no desire to be brought a second time before Bayezid as a captive.

Now Rudolfo had seized the reins, and while Michael could not know precisely what intrigue the *condottiere* had in view, he knew that Rudolfo had penetrated as far into *terra incognita* as he cared to go, and also—after events had shaped themselves to the Italian's satisfaction—he would be most likely to head back to Trebizond as soon as he had the treasure of the expedition in his hands.

It was the sight of the blow Bembo received, and his warm love of the cripple, that brought Michael to face Rudolfo.

"'Tis a lie—" Bembo had started to cry when Rudolfo's cold glance shut him up as a knife-thrust closes a turtle.

"Bembo had gossiped with my men," he said dryly. "The fool hinted that his master was bent hither on revenge. What revenge should he seek save against me with whom he has a feud as good Messer Soranzi knows well? Aye, and against the Signory of Venice that requited him with scant usury for his services."

Bembo hung his head. It was true that he had liked to babble of the Breton's prowess.

The others nodded in owl-like wisdom. In the minds of the servitors Rudolfo had gained the mastery over Michael. Soranzi and Clavijo were puzzled. Michael, who was by no means a slow thinker, sensed the drift away from him.

"I must take measures for our safety," Rudolfo was saying, "for the pagans are close on our heels. Bind me this miscreant."

"Verily—" Michael smiled quickly—"you are a rare leader, *signor*. Were you not among the captains of Nicopolis? Did not you, Clavijo, see him there? Rudolfo saw you?"

"Aye," admitted the Spaniard.

"Then answer me one question. If you saw Clavijo at Nicopolis, Rudolfo, why then must you have known he lied, even when you embarked with us upon this venture. Why were you fain to wait until now to accuse him?"

The *condottiere* could not repress a scowl at this sudden thrust, but he answered composedly:

"I may have seen him at the battle by the river, but a pox on't! I marked him not. Verily I did not recall his face when he told his tale at Venice."

Rudolfo lied well. Michael, failing to catch him off his guard, turned to Soranzi, who was too shrewd a judge of men and too alert where his own money was at risk to be convinced by Rudolfo's charge against Michael.

"Your lives, *signori*," the Breton said gravely, "are at stake. Would you know why?"

They were silent at that and the thin mouth of the merchant pinched together as he answered—

"Why?"

"You call it black magic—faith—when horsemen gallop i' the night, *signors*. Nay, they were Tatars who ride with a loose rein in day or dark. I know because I have this hour caught one who followed in our trail. Some news I had from him. War threatens between the Turk and the Tatar—the sultan and the khan. *Signori*, these be mighty monarchs and their bands of riders on this borderland are more numerous than the good people of Venice itself."

"Then," Soranzi's logical mind probed for information, "the Tatars slew our men last night?"

Rudolfo and Gian glanced at Michael, who shook his head gravely.

"Nay. The Tatars passed us as the wind passes. Our varlets were slain by Kurds of the village that Gian and his men visited. So said my prisoner. After Bembo left the place, frightened by sight of the sitting-down beast, our brave men-at-arms made themselves free of the women of the village, the Kurdish warriors of the place being absent with the riders of the Turkish army."

Gian and the others were silent at this and uneasy, lacking Rudolfo's calm.

"Two Kurds only reached our camp in the night," went on Michael, "or our throats as well might have been cut. The Moslems

do not forget a wrong, Rudolfo. Wherefore, death follows in your track."

"And what manner of man was he you caught?" inquired Soranzi uncomfortably.

"A Tatar who sighted our cavalcade and followed 'till more of his fellows could be summoned and our merchants despoiled. Mark me, Soranzi, the Tatars are grim enow, yet they attack boldly and do not slit throats i' the night. Nay, they would rip your belly with a sword. You would fare better with them."

Soranzi squirmed and the men-at-arms muttered under their breath. All glanced up and down the wooded ravine and at the impassive rock shrine.

Suddenly Gian broke the silence with a great oath and strode to Michael, his dagger flashing in his hand. The point of the weapon he set against the Breton's bare throat. Michael, after a quick glance at the ring of armed men, had not moved.

"Speak the truth, master," he growled, "or your gullet will be slit for the ants to crawl in. What devil's work brought us to this place? Whence lies Trebizond? Speak!"

The man's face was twisted by anger and fear. Michael smiled, for he could read Gian like a book and the man's action and words had told him three things.

One—Rudolfo had confided in his lieutenant that the Breton was to be made captive or done away with, or Gian would not have dared what he did. Two—Rudolfo, as well as Clavijo, had lost his bearings but did not wish the men to know it. Three—they were all afraid, and so much the more easily handled.

"You have got yourself a new poniard, Gian," he observed, "in place of the one you cast at me and Rudolfo tossed overside. It was a poor cast for such a clever thrower."

He paused interrogatively and the man, angered, caught at the bait before Rudolfo could speak.

"The mast—" he muttered and stopped. "Death and damnation!"

"The mast interfered with your throw? Precisely. Then, after the mock attack of the pirates—I thought them in the hire of Clavijo till your master cast aside his mask just now—had failed to despoil our venture for Rudolfo's profit, your master waited till he was beyond the last *bailio* of Venice. Men will wag their tongues. It was necessary to have us beyond the *bailio* and the trade-routes before Rudolfo could seize the gold and riches entrusted to Clavijo by the council. That is why we are here, Gian."

MICHAEL had guessed at this, but he had hit the mark. Gian glanced at his master inquiringly, but Michael spoke first.

"Do not make another mistake, Gian. With my life, your guidance would be lost. If you doubt it, ask Rudolfo whither lies Trebizond."

"You will tell us," said the *condottiere* dryly.

"Tut, *signor*; have you time to waste? Soranzi—a bargain. My safety and Bembo's pledged on your word, and we guide you to safety? Do you agree?"

It was to the men-at-arms rather than the merchant that Michael directed this shaft. The Venetian was thinking furiously and he nodded.

"Agreed. But stay—what proof that you can bear us hence?"

"The Tatar lies i' the thicket yonder, bound with his own belt. Your addlepates, Rudolfo, would never find him. But bid them look i' the thorns behind the shrine——"

In a moment Gian and his worthies dragged forth a squat figure, wrapped hand and foot with strips torn from a shawl girdle. His broad head was set close to square shoulders, and while his body was long and muscular, his legs were short and bowed. His slant eyes glared at his captors who freed his ankles so that he could stand without difficulty.

The Tatar's sword had been tossed by Michael into the bushes, well out of the prisoner's reach.

"What this man knows he will tell me," explained Michael, "and no man of you save, perchance, Bembo will understand aught of what he says. I know a word that will conjure us our safety through Tatary."

Hereupon the men-at-arms crossed themselves and muttered under their breath. They were more than ever convinced that Michael had intercourse with the powers of evil and that this native was his familiar.

"The bargain is struck," asserted Soranzi again.

But out of the corner of his eye Michael saw Rudolfo gnawing his thumb and presently, leaning toward Gian, to whisper a

quick word. Gian in turn muttered something to his men and took his stand behind the bent form of Bembo. Michael waited alertly.

Rudolfo cried at him suddenly—

"Your sword and dagger, throw them down!"

The words were prompt and so was Michael's answer. He thrust his captive forward against one of the oncoming troopers. Snatching out his sword, he parried the rush of another, beating down the man's blade and sending him to the earth.

Instantly Michael dropped to his knees and the third assailant tripped over him, cursing. The fourth, a short, wiry fellow in pliant mail, thrust at the Breton before he could rise. Michael caught the blade in a fold of his cloak and lashed out as he came erect. The man dropped with a split skull.

Rudolfo had set spurs to his horse, while the others looked on aghast at the swift clash of weapons. Before Michael could step aside, the *condottiere's* beast struck the sea-captain, knocking him a dozen feet. Then came the grinning Gian, who leaped upon Michael's sword where it had fallen and glanced inquiringly at Rudolfo.

"Do not slay," instructed the *condottiere.* "Bind Master Bearn to the Tatar or Turk or whatever breed of devil it may be——"

"And where may the devil be, *signor?*" inquired Gian, gripping the half-stunned Michael in his great hands.

They looked around at that and beheld the Tatar vanishing into the bushes up the slope by the road. His long turban cloth trailed after him as he leaped with the nimbleness of a goat from rock to rock until he passed from sight before the men-at-arms could draw bow. Nor could a horse follow where he had gone.

"No matter," grunted Rudolfo. "Messer Soranzi, verily you are a greater fool than I took you for. The guile of Master Bearn bewitched you. Not only would you have let him ride free, but you would have followed where he led—to his allies the Tatars or fiends or whatever they be."

He leaned from his saddle to jerk Michael, who was more than a little hurt, to his feet.

"So, my friend," he sneered, "you would hide your knowledge from us and bargain for it! By the Pope's head! Tonight I promise myself we will know all you know. Gian has a rare knack with a dagger's point inserted in a man's ear. There is no time for't now; this is a perilous place——"

Whereupon the men-at-arms set Michael on a horse, binding his wrists together behind him with the wrappings taken from the escaped Tatar. The Breton was badly shaken and bleeding from the mouth, but they handled him in no wise gently.

The minds of the servitors were full of the idea of Satanic powers pursuing them. Since Michael showed no fear and had familiar knowledge of the pagan tribes, these men had no doubt that he was in league with the powers of darkness that their superstition conjured up.

Soranzi was torn between fear and greed. The astrologer in Venice had assured him of profits passing through his hands such as he had never seen before.

As for Clavijo, he was burning in the fires of conscience. He had lied. In his story before the Venetians he had repeated that his followers had been slain at the edge of *terra incognita*, and that the spirits of the waste land had dogged his footsteps.

And now these two things had happened. He felt as if he were under a spell and found himself looking about for the tower of skulls that he had included in his tale. Only Rudolfo was free from superstition.

Under his quick orders the bulkier and less valuable portions of baggage and stores were abandoned. Sick horses were set loose. When they had mounted, Clavijo saw that no provision had been made for the sick servant or the dying soldier.

"You would not leave them, *signor?*" he cried.

Rudolfo shrugged.

"They will die anyway."

When the cavalcade of mounted men and pack-animals moved off, Bembo slipped from the thicket where he had hidden during the hurried departure and ran among the horses, clinging to Soranzi's stirrup. The merchant, reduced to a state of panic by the events of the past hour, drove him off with kicks and blows.

"Leave the fool to his folly," gibed Gian, who noticed Bembo's frantic efforts to keep up.

"To leave him would be to reveal our course to those who pursue us," observed Michael. So Bembo was suffered to hold his friend's stirrup.

IX

THE RAVINE

THERE is a subtle intoxicant of fear in the hurry of many persons to be the first to reach a point of safety. The trot of the horses broke at times into a gallop. Some of the stores fell from the packs. Soranzi alternately cried upon God to witness the loss of valuable goods and prayed for greater haste.

The sun was obscured, a thin mist veiled the pine-thickets and the stretches of sandy ground on either hand. The heat wilted their strength. Rudolfo turned many times, apparently thinking to throw pursuers off their track, but the track of a score of horses could not be concealed, Michael knew.

As evening closed in they were threading through gorges that hastened the coming of darkness. Often they looked back in the failing light. No one desired to be last. And then Rudolfo, in the lead, halted abruptly.

Before them in the twilight stood a great mound of human skulls.

"'Tis the Sign o' the Skull," muttered Bembo, "where we will sleep the night."

The jester voiced the fear that had come upon the party with the evening. Clavijo had ordered a huge fire to be lighted near the mound of human bones, and the ruddy glare of the flames shone upon a hundred grinning masks that had been men. Nor was it any chance collection of skeletons piled together on a battle-field. The pyramid of skulls was regular in shape and no body-bones were visible.

The lighting of the fire brought night upon them with a rush, down the black bulk of the mountain-slopes and the mouths of the rock gullies that opened into the gorge on either side. Instinctively the men kept close to the blaze and they ate little dinner although they had fasted since morning. Michael sat apart under guard of a sentry and without food. By Rudolfo's orders he had been bound hand and foot and only the unexpected sight of the monument of skulls had delayed the torture that was preparing at Gian's hands.

Sight of the pyramid told Michael something unknown to the others and only guessed by Rudolfo. The *condottiere* had lost his way.

During the panicky run of the afternoon when the sun was invisible behind clouds, Rudolfo unwittingly had doubled again on his course. Whereas Clavijo had started them north that morning; since then they had been circling blindly to the south and east.

And they had penetrated to the *terra incognita*—the gateway of the unknown land about which Clavijo had babbled. And to the place that Michael had known as the Gate of Shadows, where the five Christians had been buried.

It was a rare jest, thought Michael. Rudolfo was entering the place he had tried to shun, whither Michael had intended to lead him—and Clavijo, the liar, had beheld reality.

He heard a footfall behind him in the gloom and turned his head cautiously, for it was not the sentry's step. The soldier had moved off a score of paces toward the fire and stood leaning on a spear, his back toward Michael.

A foot from his eyes Michael made out the glimmer of steel in the faint light, and stiffened. A cloaked form took shape behind the dagger—a figure bent and stealthy. The knife was thrust forward even as Michael saw it, and its edge sliced away the bonds at his wrists.

Next, food on a wooden platter was placed in his cramped hands.

"Eat, for love of San Marco," breathed a trembling voice. "Brave Master Bearn, worthy captain, harken but do not turn your head. I have given to the sentry—a murrain on his greed—a whole purse of good silver *dinari*, that he be blind and deaf for a short moment."

It was Soranzi and a terrified Soranzi. Michael, as he munched the meat, reflected that Rudolfo's men were capable of taking a leaf from their master's book in selling their services.

"Pietro Rudolfo has dropped his mask with me," began the Venetian swiftly. "Alack! You spoke the truth this noon. I am ruined—beggared! He holds me captive and will take my goods—aye, every packet and bale. Every *soldi's* worth."

He wrung his hands and plucked at his thin beard viciously.

"Once in Trebizond again, under the weak rule of the Comneni, Rudolfo claims all my store and the fine presents for the Cham as his, as payment for saving our

lives, he said. O body of San Marco, O blessed head of the Pope! He will hold me for ransom—a prince's ransom—" Soranzi sighed, whereat his meager teeth fell to chattering.

"Do you not see the rest, Master Bearn? The varlets, save his *bravi*, are dead or will be. Clavijo can not impeach him, for dread of the retribution of the council. You he will first try to bribe, believing that you, like himself, are bent on spoil. If you refuse his offer Gian will handle you till you reveal the way by which we may return to Trebizond."

"This is no news," said Michael shortly. "It means merely that Rudolfo knows that he has lost his way and is losing patience."

"But you will never see the walls of Trebizond. You will be left in a grave at Cabasica. Nay, more. Rudolfo, see you, with my goods and person in his hand, will attack and overpower the small Venetian outpost in the city. He will sell his spoils and perchance his sword to Genoa, which will pay a rare price. It was for this he sailed with us. Oh, we are lost! Yet the wise astrologer of my house in Venice predicted sight of extraordinary profits for me on this venture—the like of which I had never handled before."

Soranzi crept closer and clutched Michael's shoulder in a sweating hand.

"Good Master Bearn, you know this country. You are intimate with the pagan Moors and other infidels. I will pay well for a quick hand to aid me. Is it true you can lead us back from this accursed spot?"

Until now the Breton had been surveying the changing shadows on the black mountain walls that seemed to press down toward the fire.

"It is the Gate of Shadows," he said. "The *tengeri darband*. The Turks say that the spirits of a thousand dead, slain by this sword, walk in the valley of nights. It is the site of a massacre a generation ago. They shun it. Aye, it is a pass in the Ectag Mountains, through which Fra Odoric made his way out of the unknown land that lies beyond."

Even in his panic the merchant was struck by his companion's tone.

"You were here before? How may I know it?" Inbred suspicion struggled with his new desire to propitiate Michael.

"Behind the tower of skulls, in the sand of the gorge between two rocks that have the semblance of men's faces, you will find a grave with a cross, Soranzi."

"I have seen it."

"Five men are buried there. They were my mates, Christian slaves taken from a French caravel off the Anatolian shore."

"In the name of ——, why did you return hither?"

Michael stretched his stiff arm and laughed.

"To see the face of the king who did not fear the Turk."

The merchant's fears were thronging upon him.

"Harken, Master Bearn. I see Rudolfo talking with Gian. You are a man of your word; I never doubted it. If I free your feet with this dagger—the knots be overstrong for fingers—and give you the weapon, will you stab Rudolfo when he comes hither? He will think you bound. The sentry is my man. He and I will set upon Gian, until you can join us. Money and their own fears will deliver the other two soldiers to us——"

"And if I will not?"

"Gian's knife in your ear. You want a larger bounty? Name it."

By now Rudolfo and his lieutenant were moving toward them slowly. Soranzi fairly capered in anxiety, holding the dagger just beyond Michael's reach.

"Swear!" he whispered. "Five hundred gold bezants—nay, seven hundred of Venetian weight and measure——"

"A pox on your mouthing," grunted Michael. "Be still!"

He was studying the surrounding darkness with interest. A stone had rolled from the mouth of a near-by gorge. From the plain outside the ravine he could make out the soft *click-click* where a horse's hoof struck upon rock.

Riders were closing in on the men by the fire. Michael had expected them for some time. Rudolfo, after carelessly letting the Tatar slip away, had left a trail broad enough for a blind man to follow.

Then, as if this were not enough, the Venetians had made a bonfire in the ravine that would indicate the exact position of their camp.

The question in Michael's mind was—were the newcomers Tatars or Turks? Evidently the former, since the Ottoman bands shunned the gorge that they had named the Gate of Shadows.

AS HE reached this conclusion Michael made out the figure of a horseman at the edge of the circle of firelight. It was a Tatar and the same Tatar that Michael had captured that noon.

One of the men-at-arms beheld the newcomer at the same moment and gave a startled cry. The cry was echoed by Michael's shout.

"Cast down your weapons, fools!"

He knew the danger of resistance if men of the Tatar horde had surrounded them. The dozen Christians, afoot and framed against the fire, would not be a match for half their number of mounted warriors, armed with bows.

Too startled to heed the warning, or believing that Michael meant to betray them to the riders who were emerging out of the shadows, the man-at-arms who had given the alarm cast his spear at the foremost rider.

Michael rose, felt the hindrance of the cords on his ankles, caught the knife from the petrified Soranzi, slashed himself free of bonds and thrust the weapon back into the merchant's hand.

Soranzi was clawing at him.

"Guard me! I will pay what you ask."

A score of horsemen rode into the firelight. The Venetian who had cast the spear was cut down by the Tatar who had dodged the missile easily.

Again Michael shouted to his party:

"Stand back! Sheath your swords if you do not love death. Ah, the cattle—" as the men ran about, seeking their weapons and sending a hasty arrow or two at the riders who swept over them with a quick rush of snorting horses and a red flash of swords in the firelight.

Gian ran close to the fire and wheeled, to cast a javelin at a gnome-like rider. The man went down, but a second Tatar caught the lieutenant's sword-thrust on his small round shield and split Gian's steel cap with a sweep of a heavy curved sword.

With a clash of armor Gian fell prone. The sentry who had been standing by Michael as if paralyzed now turned to flee into the dark, crying:

"The fiends of hell are loose! God have mercy upon our souls."

Michael reflected even as he ran toward the fire, avoiding the rush of a horseman, that men who fled from sword-strokes and cried on God for help merited little mercy.

The sentry's shout of fear turned to a moan as the Tatar who had passed Michael overtook him in the outer rocks. Soranzi had fallen to his knees and being patently unarmed—the knife had dropped from his trembling hands—was spared for the moment.

Michael saw that Rudolfo had taken a stand between the fire and the tower of skulls, his sword gleaming, his thin lips writhing.

A rider spurred upon the *condottiere*—Michael noticed that the Tatar horses seemed trained to go anywhere, even near flames—and a squat black body swung from the saddle. The Tatar leader leaped at Rudolfo's head, taking the thrust of the Venetian's sword on his shield.

The weight of the flying body broke the blade like glass and the two men grappled on the ground.

"My left arm for a moment's truce!" thought Michael, turning to face the riders who were trotting up to him. The last of the men-at-arms had been struck down.

"*Pax.* Oh verily *pax!* Peace, my gentle dogs. If you are men, bethink you, there has been enough of slaying; if hellions, begone to purgatory, I conjure you—avaunt!"

With the exception of the warrior who was locked in Rudolfo's arms the Tatars reined in and looked up with exclamations of wonder. They saw Bembo.

The grotesquely striped and bedraggled figure of the fool squatted mid-way up the pyramid of skulls. His teeth were chattering and his long arms shot out from his body in frenzied exhortation.

Bembo had seized the first vantage-point to hand. Now he gazed hopefully and imploringly at Michael. "Conjure the demons, Brother Michael; weave the spell you told us of——"

The half-moment of quiet was what Michael sought. He lifted his empty left hand and shouted one word in Turki.

"Ambassadors!"

One or two of the riders looked at him in surprize. Michael had learned in Bayezid's camp that in the Tatar country envoys to the khans or chiefs were inviolate. Ordinarily merciless, the Tatar war-chiefs took pride in the number of emissaries from other lands that came to them with tribute.

And in several instances the Tatars kept faith better than the monarchs of Europe. They respected an envoy and

were bitter in their rage against enemies who slew Tatar emissaries.

"Ambassadors are here," repeated Michael. "Are you dogs, to worry the stranger who comes with gifts?"

Those who understood his words repeated them to the others. The leader heard and rose from Rudolfo to stride to Michael.

His men joined him. They were short, brawny warriors, wearing furs and leather over their mail, and with bronze helmets bearing pointed guards that came down over brow and nose. Scarcely less black than their lamb's-wool *kaftans* were their faces, with slant, hard eyes and thin mustaches.

Their short swords were broader at the end than the hilt, and each had a target of bull's hide on his left arm. Michael saw that the empty saddles bore quivers and bows.

"Well conjured, Brother Michael," chattered Bembo. "The charm was a mighty charm. I will aid you."

He started to scramble down from his mount when one of the warriors seized his leg and jerked him to earth, staring at him with ox-like curiosity. Bembo's zeal dwindled.

He skipped away. The Tatar, no taller than the hunchback, made after him with the rolling gait of one better accustomed to a horse's back than the earth.

"I am Gutchluk, a *noyan* of the White Horde," growled the leader to Michael. "I heard your bellow. Whom seek you?"

Michael hesitated, for he did not know the name of the monarch of Tatary.

"The sultan?" queried Gutchluk. "Say so and we will sit you in the fire for the sultan has made prisoner some of the lords of Tatary and our Horde is angered."

"Nay," said Michael promptly.

"At Cabasica your men said they were merchants."

"I am not a merchant. I seek the khan."

At this Gutchluk's expression changed.

"Tamerlane the Great," he cried. "You go to the Lord of the World?"

"Tamerlane the Great," repeated Michael.

The warriors who had been pawing over the stores now desisted and came over to the fire, bringing with them Rudolfo, who was watchful and alert in spite of his bruises.

Gutchluk stared at his captives for a space, grunting under his breath as an animal does when disturbed.

"So be it," he made decision. "We will take you and your gifts to the Mighty One and you can spit out your speeches to him."

With that the Tatars fell to ransacking the half-empty pots and sacks of food, gorging themselves enormously. Soranzi, who crept from hiding in the rocks, marveled at this and at the callous way in which the men of the Horde stepped on bodies of the slain. He sought Michael and found him talking to Clavijo.

"Now, my lord the liar," the Breton was saying; "here must you serve yourself. Lie roundly and mightily at Tamerlane's court or you are lost."

He withdrew to talk long with Bembo, while Rudolfo slept in company with the Tatars who were not on watch by the fire and where the horses were picketed.

Before an hour had passed Soranzi, who had been intent on binding up his goods again, saw that Bembo sat alone. Michael was not to be seen.

THE Breton had seized a moment when the sentries were away from the fire to move back into the darkness of the outer gorge. He had marked the position of the outpost Gutchluk had placed and circled this with care for he had a healthy respect for the keen senses of the Tatar watchers.

Nor did he make the mistake of attempting to take a horse from the pickets. Instead he felt his way patiently out of the ravine at the place where they had entered it. He found the grave he had dug, and its cross. Then he crossed the plateau to the woods on the western side.

The first glimmer of dawn showed him one of the horses belonging to the Venetians that had strayed out to the grass during the fight. This he mounted and rode back along the trail Rudolfo had taken. Once he paused to dismount and search in the thicket for something. He emerged with the sword he had taken from Gutchluk twenty-four hours ago.

Thrusting this through his belt, he continued on to the west.

Michael had not left the camp because he feared retribution by Gutchluk for his attack upon the Tatar leader at this spot.

Gutchluk had been following the Venetians and Michael had surprized him and overcome him fairly. This would raise rather than lower him in the other's esteem.

But Michael was aware that emissaries to a Central Asian monarch were always detained for a long space before given an audience. The more important the ambassadors, the longer the delay. It would be weeks before Clavijo and his companions could hold speech with Tamerlane.

Meanwhile Gutchluk had said that the sultan and the khan were at the point of war. Michael, if he was to have a hand in events, could not afford to be kept idle in the Tatar camp. Moreover the foolish resistance of Rudolfo's men had lowered the status of the Venetians.

If Tamerlane was the man Michael thought him, it would take more than trade-goods wrung from the captives to gain his ear. So Michael must bring to Tamerlane more than that.

Gutchluk had said that Bayezid and all his power was at Angora.

Was not this a good omen? Michael smiled, reflecting that he had sworn to the sultan that he would return to his court.

Now as he rode he kept swinging his right arm stiffly at his side. The blood was beginning to run through thinned veins and before long he would be able to use his crippled arm.

X

THE TOPAZ RING

IT WAS as if Clavijo and his party had been snatched up by a hurricane. They were swept down from the gorge called the Gate of Shadows, swept out to the south upon the high, rolling steppe of Iran where the receding hills of Mazandaran showed purple against the sky to the north.

Beyond these same hills, farther to the north, stretched the Sea of Sarai—the Caspian—about which Clavijo had permitted his tongue to wag and which he had never seen, although Michael Bearn had bitter knowledge of it.

The Tatars halted for nothing, except a snatch of sleep at the hamlets of sheep-herders or the bare walls of a Moslem *khan* by a caravan track. They, so Gutchluk explained by signs, were anxious to leave the borderland of the Turk behind. Not on their own account, for the men of the sultan were dogs, but to safeguard the precious persons of the ambassadors.

So they passed over the dry grass of Iran, away from the clay valleys and the groves of the land that was called Kuhistan, in Persia, and many interminable lines of clumsy camels they saw passing over the steppe at night, and many ant-like bodies of Tatar warriors mounted on shaggy ponies inimitably swift of foot. And Clavijo and his people marveled. The Tatars had swung to the right and were journeying now toward the setting sun.

But they saw naught of the city with brazen walls or the gold trees or the fountains of wine of the earthly paradise that Clavijo had called Cathay.

"*Hic ignotus sum quia passuum,*" quoth Bembo the jester blithely three weeks later. "Here we are the barbarians, and the barbarians are the great lords and *signors*. Lord Gutchluk quarters us i' this penthouse and furnishes us a live ox, that we, poor Frankish outlanders, may eat in our cage like the hunting-leopards I saw dragged past i' their leash this day at time o' mass."

They were, in fact, at a *serai* where a huge fire glowed over which the Tatars roasted the pieces of animals whole. The *serai* was almost the only building in what seemed to the travelers to be the encampment of a limitless army. For two weeks they had been kept waiting, in the midst of this army.

Bembo was like a man born anew. Gutchluk and the other Tatars had treated him respectfully, for he bore himself boldly and had clad his person in new finery from the stores.

"The mummery is on, i' faith," grinned the jester. "Aye, each buffoon of us has his part to play. Behold Signor Dominus, the consul-general Clavijo—the great lord-treasurer, *provveditore*, Soranzi—likewise Rudolfo, the lord-general and master of armies. And most of all, behold Bembo, the wise councilor, the privy coz, the whisperer of kings. Without him, my hearties, the rooks would be emptying your eye-sockets back in yonder Inn o' the Skull."

Clavijo frowned.

"Tamerlane will see us this noon," he said. "We have been kept waiting long."

"Aye, verily. The delay measures our importance i' the eyes o' these gentlefolk. Two days agone Lord Gutchluk and a baron who looks like a prince of Eblis took

our gifts to the king, along with the camels of a khan of Karabak and the painted giant beasts with a tail where their nose should be—the beasts that are gifts from a lord of Khorassan. Now our turn has come and you must lie cleverly or be fed to the beasts, see you?"

"We can say we are an embassy from Venice."

"Nay, San Marco forbid. Firstly, the council, hearing that we who are mere voyagers have usurped ambassadorial rôle, would slit our throats. Secondly, there would be no need o' that, for Tamerlane would have us tied to the ground for his giant beasts to walk upon."

Bembo smiled at the consternation written in the Spaniard's face.

"Signor Gutchluk," he explained, "confessed to me not an hour since that recently certain merchants of Venice penetrated so far as Damascus and endeavored to sell nostrums and false sovereign waters i' the fashion o' mountebanks, and to claim exemption from taxes and gifts as is their wont. The Tatars threw them into the river. So, my cousins, we can not be Venetians for the word rings so ill i' the ears of these barbarians as the Venetian nostrums i' their bellies."

They were silent at that, looking blackly at the man whose tale had brought them—Soranzi, Rudolfo, and the injured Gian—hither.

"I tell you," swore Rudolfo, "that Bearn has betrayed us. Why else is he escaped here hence with a whole skin, leaving us to damnation?"

Michael's departure from the Gate of Shadows had puzzled the Tatar guards as well as Rudolfo. The warriors had searched for him briefly without result and had then pressed on to their army. What mattered it to them if one of the Franks chose to part company with them, so long as the chief ambassadors, as they considered Clavijo and Rudolfo, and the all-important gifts remained?

"He will return to us this night or the morrow," asserted Bembo stoutly. "He pledged it me the night he left us. Who are we that we should know his comings or that which he seeks in this land?"

"'Twere wiser, methinks,' to question who he is." Rudolfo strode surlily back and forth in front of the clay platform by the fire on which Bembo squatted.

So pliable is human nature that Clavijo and Soranzi had come to look upon the *condottiere* as a possible protector in their plight. At least they feared the Tatars—who seemed to them like animals—more than they feared Rudolfo, now that Michael had vanished.

"Is he not leagued with these pagan demons?" demanded the Italian. "What will his coming avail us? Nay, we must trust to our wits to cut a way out of this coil. I have heard the Sultan of the Turks, whose power is not far from this camp, is a rich monarch, different from these beasts. How if we could——"

He broke off as Bembo chuckled.

"So this is Cathay!" grinned the jester. "We must be bewitched, for we saw naught of Clavijo's golden city."

The Spaniard winced.

"Your master swore we would be safe here," he said uneasily. The coming ordeal of the audience with Tamerlane weighed on the three of them. Bembo alone was careless.

Having the gift of tongues, the jester had conversed in broken Greek with Gutchluk and his faith in Michael was strong.

"My master is a true man," he insisted. "He said he would join us at Tamerlane's court at the first of the new moon. He will keep his word."

Here they looked up as Gutchluk entered with another powerful warrior in black armor; the man Bembo had termed a prince of Eblis. The ambassadors were summoned by Tamerlane, who waited them.

They mounted and rode through the Tatar encampment, seeing on every hand nothing but horses, sleeping warriors, smiths who labored at smoking forges, herders who guided great masses of cattle hither and yon in the dust.

Then a vista of round tents opened before them. Some of these were on massive wagons; some bore standards of fluttering yaks' tails. It was a veritable city of tents.

Hard-faced men glanced at them casually; black slaves made haste to get out of their way. Once a line of elephants passed, hauling sleds on which were wooden machines of war, unknown to them.

It seemed to the cringing Soranzi that they had invaded a city of beasts. He heard a lion roar from the cages where Tamerlane's animals were kept. He saw giraffes, brought from Africa, penned in a

staked enclosure. Yet his merchant's eye noted the barbaric splendor of gold-inlaid armor, jeweled weapons, costly rugs spread within the tents and women's cloaks fashioned of ostrich feathers.

What kind of monarch, he thought, ruled over this hive-like multitude of pagans?

TAMERLANE the Great, King of Kings, Lord of the East and West, extended a gnarled hand across the chess-board and touched his opponent's king.

"*Shah rohk,*" he said. "The game is mine."

He freed a long ruby from one bent finger and handed it to the man who knelt across the board from him—a silk-clad Chinese general who had come from the edge of the Gobi to pay homage.

Few could match wits even with fair success with the Tatar conqueror, for *Timur-i-leng* (Timur the Lame) had fashioned himself a board with many times the usual number of squares and men.

Gathered about the board were princes of Delhi, amirs of Bokhara, and khans of the White and Black Tatars and the powerful Golden Horde that reached to the shores of the Volga. They were standing under a gigantic pavilion stretched upon supports taller than the masts of ships. Over the head of the conqueror hung silk streamers, swaying in the evening breeze, for the sides of the pavilion were open and the men within could look out from the dais on which they stood, over the tents of the army.

"Summon the Frank ambassadors," ordered Tamerlane.

They came through one of the outer porticos of the purple pavilion—Clavijo and Soranzi and Bembo, each with his arms gripped on either side by a Tatar noble. They were worried and anxious, for they had ridden for six hours through the army that never seemed to have an end.

The custom of holding envoys by the arms seemed to them ominous. Clavijo stared at the kneeling Tatar, noting his big, bent shoulders, his massive length of body, his shaggy brows and hard eyes. Tamerlane, nearly seventy years of age, was near-sighted—a peculiarity that made his naturally fierce stare the more difficult to bear.

Soranzi blinked at the low table of solid gold on which the Tatar leaned and muttered under his breath as he tried to estimate the value of a blue diamond in Tamerlane's plain steel helmet.

"From whom do you bear submission and greetings to me?" demanded the monarch. His speech had to be translated into Persian and then Greek, through two interpreters.

Clavijo's broad brow was damp with perspiration. To gain time to think, he said that he did not understand.

"Then take those dogs of interpreters and lead them through the army by a rope thrust into their noses," commanded the Tatar at once. "Bring others who are wiser."

The two unfortunates threw themselves on their knees, and Clavijo paled. But Bembo spoke up, kneeling and crossing his hands on his chest.

"Great khan," he observed in Greek, "their words were clear; it was my companion, the dominus, who was dazed by the splendor of your presence."

This, being interpreted by other mouths, satisfied Tamerlane and he motioned to the interpreters to continue.

"Franks," he resumed, "I have taken your gifts. The cloth-of-silver and gold pleased me. From what king do you come, from the other end of the earth?"

Hereupon Soranzi could not restrain a murmur of anguish. The bales of cloth had been his personal stock in trade, now lost beyond repair. Clavijo bowed and at last found an answer.

"From the King of—of Spain," he replied.

"Good! I have heard of him. How is my son, the King of Spain? Is his health good? Has he much cattle and treasure?"

They stared at Clavijo, these Armenians, Tatars and Chinese. The Europeans were quite a curiosity—petty envoys from a tiny kingdom somewhere at the end of the world. They had come, so reasoned the Tatars, to bask in the magnificence of the Lord of the East and West.

Clavijo was very much afraid. He would have welcomed the sight of Michael Bearn's cheerful face. But he gathered assurance as he began to describe the splendors of Aragon, enlarging upon the great ships and towns of Spain.

At this, however, Tamerlane began to pay more attention to a topaz ring that he turned and twisted upon a sinewy hand.

Fearing that his tale was lacking fire, Clavijo began to exaggerate as was his wont, until he was boasting hugely. Tamerlane scowled under bushy brows, first at the speaker, then at the ring. Finally he held up his hand for the Spaniard to see.

"Behold, Frank, a magician's stone," he said gruffly. "The topaz turns purple when any one lies to me. I always watch it and it has served me well."

Superstitious, as all men of his time and race, Clavijo stared in dismay. Indeed his round face turned a very good shade of purple. His flow of words dwindled as he scanned the topaz and fancied that it changed color.

This might well have been due to the twilight that was falling upon the great pavilion.

"Frank," observed the conqueror, "you come at a good time. My army is mounted for war against the Sultan Bayezid. He has preyed upon my subjects in lesser Armenia and I have offered him terms by which he may save his head. We will hear what he will reply."

To hear the sultan who was the scourge of Christendom mentioned as Tamerlane might speak of a slave added fuel to Clavijo's active imagination.

"If there is a battle, you will see a goodly sight," repeated the old conqueror. "Does my son the King of Spain fight battles or is he a dog of a merchant like the Venetians?"

Clavijo essayed a reply, glanced at the topaz ring which seemed to him to be now a deep purple indeed, and the last of his courage oozed from him. Breaking from the Tatar warriors who held his arms, he fell on his knees.

"Mercy, great lord," he bellowed. "Oh, mercy. Grant me royal clemency if I have offended. Make me a captive, but spare my life!"

This being interpreted, Tamerlane smiled.

"Verily," he said shortly, "the Frank is frightened by my face. Nay, Timur the Tatar has harmed no ambassador. Fear not, but join in our feast."

He signed to the men who held the visitors. Soranzi, a-tremble with anxiety, took this to be a signal for their destruction. Without waiting for the speech to be translated, he flung himself at the Tatar's feet, embracing his slippers.

"O King of Kings," he cried, "my companion has lied, even as your wisdom has suspected. He is naught but a seeker after gold, disguised as an envoy. The gifts that pleased you were mine. I will pay more. Do not believe this traitor when he says that I am a merchant, for he is a liar——"

Surprized by this outburst, Tamerlane turned to the interpreters with a scowl.

"Now the fat is in the fire," sighed Bembo.

Tamerlane pulled at his thin mustache, his small black eyes darting from one to the other. He surveyed his topaz ring and grunted. There was something wolfish now in the stare of the Mongol warriors.

Rudolfo swore under his breath and Soranzi did not cease to moan his fear. Since the attack by the riders at the Gate of Shadows his dread had grown upon him. That afternoon he had seen captives of the khan hauled through the camp in cages, like beasts.

"The gifts were mine," he repeated over and over, holding fast to the Tatar's slipper.

"Then you are not ambassadors sent to Tamerlane?"

"Nay." Clavijo and Soranzi were answering in one breath when Gutchluk knelt and addressed his lord, saying that the Franks had purported to be merchants before their capture.

Tamerlane was a man who never minced words and hated deceit. He was about to speak when there was a bustle in the outer porticos. A man flung himself from an exhausted horse, crying—

"A courier for the khan!"

Those who had crowded about Clavijo and his party gave back at this, opening a lane between Tamerlane and the newcomer, barely visible in the half-light of evening, who bowed thrice and knelt before the dais.

"O King of Kings," the horseman cried in Arabic, "I have beheld the answer of the sultan. He has struck off the heads of the Tatars' envoys and placed them at the gate of Angora. Thus Bayezid has made answer to you."

The old Tatar's face grew dark and veins stood out on his forehead. He caught his sword from its sheath and swung it over the head of the unfortunate messenger who remained quietly kneeling.

Then the khan checked the sweep of his

blade mid-way and stood staring out into the dusk, his face a mask of anger. Yet when he spoke, his words were measured and deep.

"Aye, there will be a battle." He looked down at the courier. "You are a brave man. Take twenty horses and go, that your face will not remind me of the deed you bespoke."

Replacing his sword, Tamerlane ordered that the army be ready to march on the morrow. For the first time Clavijo noted the great bulk of the Tatar and the fact that he was lame. In his youth, during an affray with the Seljuke Turks, Tamerlane had been beaten from his horse and cast to earth with three ribs broken and a mangled side.

Turning back to his chess-board, he observed the Europeans who still remained held by their guards.

"Come with my court, liars and merchants," he said grimly. "Instead of jugglers and musicians, you will amuse me, for I will pass judgment upon you then."

XI

THE THUNDERBOLT

TWO weeks before Tamerlane's audience with the Christians, the stars traced the outline of the river Khabur in Anatolia, two hundred miles west of Tamerlane's camp. Down the river toward the flat roofs of the town of Angora drifted a small skiff, only half-visible in the glittering light from the stars which seemed intensified by the heat of the windless July night.

But the stars were eclipsed by the myriad torches and lanterns of Angora and the illumination of ten thousand tents clustered about the Turkish town.

Bayezid, his court and his army held festival. Angora, an unfortified trading-town, yet served admirably for mobilizing the army of the Ottomans and Seljukes. Galleys had come from Greece, where the Crescent ruled, to land their loads of Moslems on the Anatolian shore across from Constantinople; the Mameluke had sent their splendid cavalry hither from Alexandria; the veteran main army of the sultan had been withdrawn temporarily from the conquest of Constantinople.

So Angora was filled with the warriors of a dozen kingdoms. Forbidden wine flowed freely and revelry held the courtyards and roofs. The sultan knew how to hold the loyalty of his men by pleasure and by generous pay which reenforced the natural fanaticism of the Moslems and the devotion of the Janisseries—that formidable mass of soldiery recruited from Christian child slaves raised by Moslem teachers.

The skiff drifted with the current of the river to the jetties of the town, already crowded with native craft. Michael Bearn raised himself cautiously, clutched the side of a fishing-boat and climbed to the jetty.

"Who comes?"

A sharp challenge rang from a pair of spearmen standing at the shore end of the dock. Michael stiffened; then advanced carelessly.

"A sailor," he made answer in his good Arabic, "from the Byzantine coast. I have heard that the great sultan is here and I have come to look upon his face."

A lantern was brought from an adjoining hut and the two spearmen looked him over casually. Michael's skin was burned a deep brown by the sun and he had secured a short cloak that concealed the outlines of his stalwart body. His leather tunic and bare knees bore out the identity he claimed.

"Does a son of a dog think to look upon the favored of Allah?" gibed one of the Moslems. "Stay—you have been a slave on the galleys."

The soldier's sharp glance had noted the scars on Michael's wrists where the irons had pressed.

"Aye," assented the Breton; "a galley-slave." He tapped his stiffened arm. "But useless, my lord warrior. I have been freed in a battle."

His pulse quickened, for he knew the strict discipline of Bayezid's army—despite the appearance of revelry—and was aware that every precaution was being taken, now that the battle with Tamerlane was impending.

"You are no true follower of the prophet," said the sentry sharply. Michael's curls, escaping from under his loose cap, revealed that he was not one of the orthodox Moslem peoples.

"Your wisdom is fine as a rare gem," acknowledged he. "I am a Christian who has not seen his own country for many years. My lord warrior, I pray you let me pass into the town where there is wine

to be given away and sweets made of grapes and flour and butter. I have not eaten for two days."

This was strictly true. Michael's tone was that of the hopeless slave addressing his guards. The sentry sneered and ran his hand under Michael's cloak to make sure that he held no weapon, and then fell to cursing his own fate that kept him from the feasting. Michael made off.

At the river-gate of the town he was confronted by the head of a Mongol—one of the envoys from Tamerlane—caked with dried blood, stuck upright upon a spear. The crowd of soldiery and townspeople surging through the gate paused to spit at the wax-like features and to heap insults on the Tatars.

Michael was carried in with the throng, but now his eyes held a new light and his lips were hard with purpose. He knew for the first time the certainty of conflict between the sultan and the khan.

At the river's edge, up-stream, he had bought his new cloak with a few silver-pieces and the cap to match. He had cast away his sword to carry out his character of freed galley-slave.

Now Michael was among the alleys of Angora over which the crescent standard hung. He glanced indifferently at the lighted balconies where costly rugs were hung and at the magic-lantern pictures that Arabs were displaying in darkened corners. He heard the distant chant of fanatical *imams*, exorting the Moslems in the mosques.

Asking his way from a drunken Sipahi, he approached the walled gardens where Bayezid and his court held feast.

The heat grew instead of lessening that night. The glimmer of heat-lightning more than once darkened the gleam of the stars. This the *imams*, crying from balcony and courtyard, announced as a good omen.

"The Thunderbolt will strike!" they said. "The world trembles."

The heat impelled Bayezid and his divan—the councilors who feasted with him—to leave the torrid rooms of the house where they were guarded by a double line of Ottoman infantry and to seek the gardens where an artificial lake shaded by cypresses offered moderate comfort.

On this lake was a floating kiosk of teak-wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, its roof fragrant with flowers, with curtains drawn back to allow free passage to the air.

Bayezid, flushed with the stimulus of *bhang* and opium, lay back on his cushions, idly watching the play of torch-light reflected in the lake. The grandees were intent on a spectacle of women and boys who danced in iridescent garments of moghrebin and chrysoliths at the edge of the garden by the kiosk.

These feasts had been ordered by Bayezid, who felt himself at the summit of his power. Now he surveyed the splendor around him through half-closed eyes.

"We will make a welcome," he murmured, "for the Tatar boor. News has come to me that he advances with his power upon the Khabur."

They nodded assent—sheikh, malik and caliph.

"When he comes to the Khabur," went on Bayezid, "I will have a hunt declared. My troops will aid me in the pursuit of game. That will show the Tatar how much we esteem him."

Some of the councilors looked more than a little startled. It was no light thing to hunt game in the presence of Tamerlane's army. And Bayezid had ordered the Mongol envoys slain, wantonly, as it seemed.

The man who was called the Thunderbolt turned sleepy eyes to the dark face of the Sheikh of Rum, in whose country they were encamped.

"Give orders for ten thousand beaters to be mustered from the town. It is my will."

The official prostrated himself and muttered:

"Tamerlane has forty thousand infantry and twice that number of riders, O Guardian of the Faith. Will you pursue the beasts of the field when such a host stands across the river?" He plucked up courage from the sultan's silence. "Bethink you, Star of the East, there is but one cloud upon the face of your sky—Tamerlane. You have gained the Danube; Constantinople will be yours as Greece is now—then the rest of Frankistan. And, when Tamerlane falls, Iran, Tatary and India——"

"Sheikh," Bayezid smiled, "have you forgotten my spies in the Tatar camp?"

IN THIS manner was it ordained by the sultan that they should mock Tamerlane. Festival was to be held in the town, even when the Tatar horsemen occupied the opposite bank of the Khabur. The bulk of the Seljuke knights—

the pick of the host—was to be kept in its tents by the town.

The councilors, hearing this, wondered whether ceaseless conquests had not affected the mind of Bayezid. But the leaders of the Mamelukes and Janisseries smiled, saying that they were invincible and—some beasts to be slain must be first trapped.

Michael Bearn, sitting among the cypresses on the farther bank of the lake where there were no guards, watched the feast of Bayezid until dawn reddened the sky across the river and the call of the *muezzin* floated over the roofs of Angora.

He was studying again the brilliant assemblage of grandees that he had seen at times from a distance during his captivity. He noticed the councilors start up from their cushions. By the fading light of the torches he could see them staring up at the sky.

Almost at the same time he heard a sound—a shrill cry that was more like a scream. It rose from one side of the miniature lake, swelled, and dwindled swiftly.

Michael knew the cry of herons and waterfowl. This was different. It was more like the scream of a horse in pain. Yet it had sounded a hundred feet above the kiosk. A shout reached his ears from the kiosk, a bow-shot away.

"The warning of Tamerlane!"

Guards were running here and there about the lake. Torches advanced along the shore toward him from the palace. It was no time to sit wondering about the source of the queer sound in the air. Broad daylight would be upon him in a moment.

Cautiously Michael began to crawl through the willow-thickets of the lakeside, toward a gully by which he had gained his point of vantage. The light was strong enough for him to see his way.

He stumbled over something projecting from the ground and found that it was an arrow. With some difficulty he pulled it out, for his curiosity had been aroused by its weight.

Instead of a point, the shaft terminated in a hollow steel cylinder, perforated in the sides. Michael weighed it in his hand and chuckled. Such an arrow as this, sent from a powerful bow, would emit a loud whistling sound when passing through the air. In fact it had been the passage of this shaft that he had just heard.

The arrow was plainly of Tatar make and Michael guessed that some man of Tamerlane's, hidden in the rushes across the lake, had sent it as a warning to Bayezid. He thrust the shaft under his cloak, and, hearing footsteps approaching, made his way down the gully.

For several days thereafter Michael was very busy. He frequented the bazaar, heard the news of the preparation for the sultan's hunt, and out on the plain of Angora behind the town saw regiments of Janisseries drilling constantly.

And he noticed another head on the Angora gate-posts—an old Tatar fisherman who had been seen more than once dragging his nets in the river. Under the head a large bow had been placed.

Michael guessed that the man who had fired the whistling arrow would not report his feat to Tamerlane.

He heard great amirs say openly in the town that Bayezid was drunk with power and with wine. Litters of Moslem women and captives from Georgia and Greece were passing constantly through the streets.

The finest cavalry of the sultan was encamped a league behind the town, apart from the rest of the army. Angora was continually a-throng with merrymakers, as if the fast of Ramazan had just been broken.

Knowing the inexorable discipline of the Ottoman army and the merciless cunning of Bayezid, Michael doubted the evidence of his senses. This was no idle laxity or sport such as the Thunderbolt was accustomed to use in pleasuring his men.

Even when Tatar horsemen were seen, swooping about the plain across the river, there was no sign of any preparation made to meet Tamerlane.

But when Michael made his way down to the river-bank one cloudy night, he found the boats that were drawn up on shore filled with men, and out in the center of the Khabur he could discern the black bulk of guard ships moving back and forth.

"Bayezid waits!" He laughed silently. "Aye, and thus he waited at Nicopolis! I begin to see the answer to the riddle. And now, for a visit to the sentry post that welcomed me at the jetty. Grant the same two Janisseries be on watch; the hour is the same."

Dawn revealed two unexpected things to the officers of the Janisseries who commanded the guard at the river-front. On a

small dock two spearmen lay bound and gagged beside an extinguished lantern. The white woolen turban, the *kaftan* and bow of one were gone.

And one of the guard boats reported that its steersman was missing. A Janissery, the men of the galley said, had come on board when they were putting out from the shore—a warrior who declared that he knew the river and was skilled in managing a galley. He had carried a bow.

Before an hour had passed, so the tale was repeated, this helmsman had disappeared from the craft, taking with him the steering-oar. They had not heard him fall overboard. But at the end of the hour they heard a whistling arrow, shot into the air from the other side.

Michael's penetration of the Ottoman lines had been comparatively simple because the Turk guards—not yet drawn up in battle order—had not looked for a foe from within.

One of the sentries he had found at a distance from the lantern and had stunned with a blow on the forehead. The other, running toward the slight noise, had been easily overcome by the powerful Breton.

Michael exulted in the fact that his right arm was once more serviceable after a fashion. Stripping one of the guards of tunic, cloak and cap, he had gained access to a galley.

Not trusting as yet to his right arm, he had taken the steering-oar with him when he dropped over the stern of the galley to swim to the farther shore.

Here, to disturb further his late companions and to test his arm, he had let fly the cylinder-headed arrow over the river.

Now he began to run up from the bank of the Khabur, casting aside his cloak as he went and unwinding the cumbersome turban. It would not be very long, he knew, before he would encounter Tatar patrols and he did not wish to be cut down as a Janissery.

Michael had gained what he had come for. He had guessed the riddle of Bayezid's inaction and the revelry in Angora. An ambush was being prepared for Tamerlane.

The Tatars were to be beguiled into an attack and a trap was to be set for them on the river.

Michael studied the stars overhead and shaped his course by them, shaking his head as he made out a crescent moon on the horizon. He would be late for his rendezvous with Bembo.

XII

TAMERLANE DECIDES

IT WAS the night set for the Tatar attack. The Lame Conqueror had been riding slowly among his host, listening as was his wont to the talk of the warriors about the camp-fires. Tamerlane, what with his age and the pain of his old injuries, seldom slept.

When the middle watch had ended and quiet had fallen in some degree on the Mongol army, he retired to his small tent and lay down on the plain mattress that served him for a bed. He read slowly, because of his poor sight, the annals of his ancestors and the tales of past battles written down by the chroniclers.

The plan of attack for the coming day had been decided upon, and every *khatun* had his orders, which in turn were transmitted to the *tumani*—the commanders of a thousand and to the khans of the hundreds. Tamerlane, however, was restless. News had reached him from the fisher-folk of the river that the Turkish grandees were at revelry, and Bayezid himself had ordered a hunt, even within sight of the Tatar array.

This puzzled the Conqueror.

Impatiently he ordered his ivory and ebony chess-board set before him, then brushed it aside, for there was no one in attendance who could play the mimic game of warfare as Tamerlane desired. He lifted his broad head and signed to a Mongol archer at the tent's entrance.

"Bring hither the Franks. I will pass judgment upon them."

It would amuse him, perhaps until dawn, to probe the souls of the Christians from the end of the world who had tried to throw dust in the eyes of the conqueror of the world.

He surveyed them grimly as they knelt before him, their finery rumpled by the confinement of the past few days. Fear was plainly to be read in their white faces—save that of Bembo. The jester was a philosopher.

Bembo was thinking that Clavijo's Grand Cham had proved to be a strange sort of monarch indeed. Steel and wool that clad Tamerlane's long body were hardly

the silks and chrysoliths about which the Spaniard had boasted.

The brazen city of Cathay had become a city of tents. The gold house of the khan was constructed, so Bembo perceived, of bull's hide. And instead of winning wealth, joined with perpetual life, they had been deprived of their own goods—or rather Soranzi had—and bade fair to earn a swift death.

The others had not failed to remind Bembo that Michael Bearn had not appeared as he had promised. To this the jester returned only a wink.

He had recognized Michael in the courier who had come in native attire from Angora. He knew that Michael was in the camp and would seek him out.

The moon was already five days old.

"Does this Frank," Tamerlane observed to the interpreters, indicating Soranzi, "confess that he is a merchant and a thief?"

At this Soranzi, reading Tamerlane's harsh countenance, broke forth into feverish words, which the interpreters explained to their lord.

"Aye, sire. O Great Khan. Splendor of the World! O monument of mercy and essence of forgiveness! O Conqueror of Asia. Grant but one small iota of mercy to your slave."

Tamerlane nodded, unsmiling.

"I will. See yonder weapons?"

"Aye, my lord." Soranzi's eyes widened at sight of jewel-inlaid simitars and gold-chased helmets and silver camails hung upon the walls of the tent.

"They were taken from my enemies, merchant thief. It will now be the duty of your life to furbish and cleanse the spoil that I shall take. Dog, do you understand? You may smell of the riches you may not taste. Pocket but one *zecchin* of this store and your bowels shall be let out with a knife. Go, to your work."

Soranzi trembled and could not refrain from a frantic plea.

"But my goods?"

"Begin by writing down an account of them—for me."

The Tatar was not lacking in a rough sense of humor. He was naturally merciless, yet he had no love of torture. A man without a god, a man fashioned for dealing destruction, he could still tolerate another man's faith in God, and he admired courage.

"You say that you are a warrior." He addressed Rudolfo, who was watching him in sullen dread. "Good. You have seen my ranks and the camp of my foe the sultan. Tell me how your Frankish king would plan the battle."

Rudolfo licked his lips and tried to speak out clearly, but his voice quivered. He described the order of battle of the Italian mercenaries—skirmishing by irregulars, the entrenchment of pikemen behind *abattis*, the feints and countermarches that produced the bloodless battles of his knowledge.

This recital Tamerlane ended with a grunt of anger.

"I did not ask you how your children played. I will have you placed with the Tatar boys and girls tomorrow by the river, where you may see a battle."

Glancing contemptuously over Clavijo, he stared at Bembo's sad face and gay attire.

"What kind of man is this?"

The jester rose and bowed ceremoniously.

"I am your cousin, O king," he stated cheerily.

Tamerlane frowned, puzzled.

"Because," pointed out the jester, "I am maimed for the fight, whereas you are lame for the flight."

"If you are maimed, you are useless and need not live."

"So be it," agreed Bembo. "I am not afraid. Nevertheless, I would fain set eyes upon my other cousin who is only maimed in the arm."

"Who is that?" asked the matter-of-fact khan.

"A wiser man, Messer Tamerlane, than all of us put together."

Tamerlane looked around as if to mark this other Frank. He noticed a helmeted amir who salaamed within the entrance of the tent.

"The other Frank," announced the newcomer, as Tamerlane signed for him to speak, "seeks admittance to the presence of the Lord of the East and West."

Two archers of the guard held Michael Bearn by the arms. Bembo and Rudolfo—Soranzi and the Spaniard had been dismissed—stared at him in surprize.

He had grown leaner, his face blackened by the sun. Around his shoulders was a rich fur *kaftan* and silk trousers covered the tattered bindings of his legs.

The amir who had announced him bowed again before Tamerlane.

"O Kha Khan, we know not this man. Yet, because of his claim, we could not refuse him admittance." The officer glanced at the silent khan and pointed to Michael. "He claims that he is to play with you at chess—as you play it."

In contrast to the flowery etiquette of Bayezid's court, Tamerlane, who was impatient of ceremony, always encouraged direct speech. Now he frowned at Michael as if trying to recall something that escaped his mind.

"I have come to play," assented Michael gravely, "the game that the great khan plays. It is known to me."

Tamerlane's brow cleared. Michael had spoken in his good Arabic, and with this the Tatar, who liked to read the Moslem annals, was familiar. The Lame Conqueror made a practise of treating well all scholars, astronomers and men of learning whom he took prisoner.

"You are a bold man," he said. "Three days ago when you came to me as a courier from Angora I ordered that you should not let me see your face again. I gave you horses. Why did not you ride hence?"

Bembo had known that Michael was the horseman who had reached the purple tent in the plain three days before. As Michael had not greeted him at that time Bembo had kept silence, trusting that what his friend did was for the best.

The jester did not know what a desperate game his friend was playing nor that Michael, having heard that evening of Bembo's plight, had resolved to stake their lives on a single throw.

"Because, O Kha Khan," the Breton rejoined, "it came to my ears that you lacked a man to play at *shahk* (chess) in the manner of Tamerlane, which is not that of other men of feebler minds."

THE khan weighed this in silence, then motioned for the amir, the captives and interpreters to withdraw to the farther side of the tent, in the shadow. He signed for the two archers to kneel at either side of the chess-board which lay in front of him under the flickering candles.

"So be it," he assented grimly. "Frank, set up the men. Your daring earns you the chance. If you have deceived me, and can not play as you profess, these two dogs of mine will cut you in two. Your countrymen, Frank, have deceived Tamerlane. Beware lest you do likewise."

It was a long speech for the blunt Tatar to make. He was interested. His small, black eyes gleamed as he watched Michael squat on his heels before the board. Only the Persian, the Grand Mufti, Nur ud deen Abderrahman Esferaini, who had come to Tamerlane from Baghdad, and the Chinese general of Khoten had been able to cope with the Conqueror on the enlarged board and with the double number of pieces.

Now Tamerlane set up his men swiftly on his side of the board and motioned for Michael to do likewise.

Bembo, whose ready wit had grasped much of what was happening, knew that his friend could not play even the simpler game of chess as brought to Venice by the crusaders of the century before. So the jester grimaced and bit his thumb, invoking the lion of Saint Mark to Michael's aid.

The Breton fingered the array of miniature gold warriors, fashioned in the likeness of tiny horsemen, archers, elephants and *rohks*—castles—and with a single large effigy of a king. He knew neither the pieces nor their moves.

"Break off the head of one of your arrows," he ordered an archer.

The warrior hesitated, glancing at his chief, and then obeyed. Michael laid the wooden shaft carefully across the board mid-way between him and Tamerlane.

Then, smiling, he set up the pawns along his side of the arrow's shaft, and behind them the knights. Taking the thin gold chain given him by Contarini from his throat, he placed it near his end of the board, and within its circle the castles and the towering figure of the king.

In the clear space behind the gold circlet he stood up the jeweled castles. Tamerlane surveyed him fixedly, evidently growing angry. The Tatar's pieces had been set up in the orthodox fashion, very different from the queer array of the European's men.

"Explain!" he barked.

Michael touched the arrow. "The Khabur river." His finger rested on the tiny pawns. "Ships and archers." He pointed to the gold circlet. "Angora and its troops. Bayezid, the king who is the prize of the game." Last he indicated the castles. "The sultan's heavy cavalry on the plain of Angora."

Leaning forward, he ran his finger along the gold pieces—his own were silver. "The army of Timur the Lame, Conqueror of India, and the Caliphate." He looked at the impassive Tatar. "This is the game that you play, O Kha Khan. And there is no other in the world today who can play it with you—save Bayezid the Sultan. His pieces will I play as he has planned. It is for you to make the first move."

The lines in Tamerlane's withered face deepened and his black eyes snapped.

"You are a spy!"

"Perhaps. You may call me so." Michael's thin nostrils quivered, and the smile left his face. "I have been in Angora. I heard the whistling arrow fall. Before that for three years I marched with Bayezid."

Tamerlane did not shift his gaze. "Proof!"

Thrusting his hand under his *kaftan*, Michael drew forth the long folds of a Janissery's turban, spotted in places with blood. He pointed to the scars on his wrists.

"A slave, O Kha Khan." He touched again the gold chain. "A gift for service rendered at Nicopolis where the host of Frankistan was broken by the craft of the sultan. Ten thousand Christians were slain there, after they had been taken captive."

To this Tamerlane seemed indifferent. One religion, to him, was the same as another. He was trying to judge Michael's purpose. His interest in the strange maneuver of the Christian upon the chess-board still held him passive.

Bembo plucked at the arm of the watchful *condottiere*.

"See you, Rudolfo, Cousin Michael holds the Cham in leash, but methinks 'tis a thin, silken leash whereby our lives hang——"

Decision had cone to Tamerlane.

"You are an enemy of the Ottoman."

"Slavery under the Ottoman crippled me." Michael's gray eyes lighted. He had risked much to lead Tamerlane to make the statement that, spoken first by Michael, must be received with natural suspicion. "His men slew my brothers-in-arms. I have waited six years to strike a blow against him who is the greatest foe of my faith. I have heard in the Angora palace Bayezid boast that he will set your head, O Kha Khan, upon a spear before the Gate of Paradise at Damascus. Yet you alone can humble Bayezid. Will you let me serve you?"

"How?" It was typical of Tamerlane that he did not ask what reward the other might expect. Those who aided the Lame Conqueror received kingdoms; those who failed, death; unless flight saved them, which was seldom.

"It is for the Kha Khan to move." Michael smiled again and motioned at the chess-board. "The sultan's men have caught a flying pigeon that bore one of your messages to Tatáry saying that you would force the passage of the Khabur at Angora and drive Bayezid before you."

"True. The dog hunts. Aye, after he has seen my army. Disaster will come upon him for that effrontery, and the slaughter of my envoys." Tamerlane's eyes glowed fiercely. "Our Tatar hearts are mountains, our swords the whirlwind. We count as naught the numbers of our foes. The greater numbers, the greater glory for our chroniclers to write. Aye, thus will Tamerlane move, at dawn——"

His gaunt, calloused hand swept Michael's array of chessmen off the board in a single motion. Michael still smiled. He had won his throw.

"So," the Breton said, "did the Christian host at Nicopolis attack. Tamerlane has grown blind, and his wisdom is dust before the storm of the Thunderbolt."

The dark blood flooded into the forehead of the Kha Khan. Veins stood out on his forehead and the yellow around the black pupils of his eyes grew red.

"Think ye, slave, Christian cur—" his deep voice cracked. "Think ye, sucking child, the horsemen of Turan and Iran are like to the mongrels of Frankistan?"

His great hand clenched and writhed in front of the eyes of the younger man who drew back before the vehemence of the Tatar's wrath. The two watchful archers gripped Michael's arms, and Bembo sighed mournfully.

"Is it thus," said Michael swiftly, "that Tamerlane plays at *shahk?* You have made your move. I have not made mine. And Bayezid will make such a move. Do not doubt it, my khan."

The cold rebuke of the Christian wrought upon Tamerlane's anger and he became silent—as motionless as a snake coiled to strike.

"Aye," snarled Michael, twisting in the grasp of the archers, "your horsemen will sweep across the Khabur, my khan. They

will carry the line of boats Bayezid has drawn up along the farther bank and filled with archers, hidden from your sight. Aye, my lord khan. Your warriors of Turan and Iran and the Horde will not be stayed by the trap that Bayezid has set for them in the tents on the shore. Within the tents is an entrenchment of lances sunk into the ground. It will not check your myrmidons."

He laughed in the face of the old Conqueror.

"And then, verily, your Tatars will carry the town. By midday they will have beaten back the Sipahis stationed on the crest of the Angora plateau. Aye, Timur. But then what? Your ranks will be faced by forty thousand fresh cavalry—the Janisseries. Aye, and by the Mamelukes, hidden in the valleys beyond—the pick of Bayezid's army."

The black eyes of Tamerlane riveted on Michael's face.

"More than that," cried Michael, "the line of boats will be ablaze, my Conqueror. Casks of naphtha are hidden within them, to be set alight. Your men will find no water to drink upon the plain of Angora; the river is foul. Your back will be to the river. Bayezid will turn aside from his hunt, which is meant but to cast dust in your eyes, and set his heavy cavalry against your tired and thirsty followers. By nightfall the riders of Turan will be slain or in the river. Aye, there are war-galleys awaiting you, around the upper bend of the Khabur. Your men have never fought against the Turkish ships."

At this Tamerlane brushed his hand across his near-sighted eyes, and a hissing breath escaped his hard lips.

"Bayezid revels—to make you the blinder," concluded Michael bitterly. "He ordered your emissaries slain, to anger you to attack. In this manner, not otherwise, will he make of your name a mockery, O Kha Khan, and of your empire—dust."

For the space of several moments there was complete silence, while a dozen men hung upon the next word of the old Conqueror.

Instead of speaking, Tamerlane rose and limped to the tent entrance, while the guards fell back with lowered heads. He glanced at the stars, marking the hour, and at the dark masses of men assembling under the wan gleam of the new moon, low on the horizon.

"Take the captives hence," he said at last to his attendants, "save the Frank in the *kaftan*. Summon Mirza Rustem, my grandson, Mahmoud Khan, and the *noyans* (barons). Take through the camp the new command of Tamerlane; my men are to sleep. The order of battle is to be changed."

ALONE with Michael and a single servant in his tent, Tamerlane signed to his cup-bearer to fill two bowls with wine.

Obeying the request which was virtually a command, Michael bent one knee, touched the cup to his chest and forehead and put it briefly to his lips. The Tatar emptied his with a single gulp.

"Have you a thought," he asked bluntly, "how this sultan who has set a trap may be caught in his own deceit?"

Michael looked at the old Tatar thoughtfully, and smiled, reading the purpose under the other's words.

"Does a sparrow," he countered, "give counsel to a falcon—when the hood is removed from the eyes of the falcon?"

If he had made a suggestion, it would in all probability have been futile and would have opened him to the suspicion of being, after all, a secret agent of Bayezid, who had many such.

"Aye, if Tamerlane commands!"

"Then send a hundred of your horsemen to cut out a river-galley, to learn whether the boats be not manned and equipped as I said. Dispatch another hundred up the Khabur, to locate the war-galleys that I have seen."

Tamerlane tossed the empty bowl from him and poured Michael's scarcely tasted wine upon the rugs of the tent. It was an unpardonable offense to fail to empty a bowl bestowed by the khan; but Tamerlane dealt with such things in his own way.

"Those men have already been sent," he grunted. "I bade you spit out your thought how Bayezid may be attacked. He is too shrewd to force the crossing of the Khabur, and by the sun of heaven, my Tatars would throw dirt in my face if I sit here in my tents like a woman with child."

Thoughtfully Michael traced out the imaginary line of the river upon the chessboard.

"The sultan has shaped his strength to meet an attack," he responded slowly.

"It is true that he is too wise to cross the river. It is written, O Kha Khan, in the memoirs of the Ottoman that he who trusts too greatly in his wisdom shall stumble and eat dirt. Bayezid's strength would be more like weakness were he forced to attack——"

"Speak a plain thought!"

"Pretend to fall into the sultan's trap. And meanwhile get the pick of your army above or below Angora and across the river——"

"How?"

Michael smiled.

"If Tamerlane wills, a sparrow may become a falcon. I have taken the hood from the eyes of the falcon."

For a space the Tatar considered this, while one after the other the councilors and leaders of his army stepped into the tent—lean-faced men in armor—the few who had been selected by the Lame Conqueror from the warriors of mid-Asia.

"What reward claim you for this?" demanded the old man abruptly.

"I would ride with your horsemen to see the downfall of Bayezid."

Tamerlane grunted and glanced at the scattered miniature warriors of the chessboard.

"So, Frank," he growled, "you can not play chess!"

Michael shook his head.

"That is a pity," said Tamerlane regretfully. "You would make a rare player."

DAWN had broken over the river and the Tatar standards before the tents were outlined against the streaks of sunrise when Michael walked alone from the council of Tamerlane and sought Bembo.

He found the fool huddled beside a cage of the khan's beasts, guarded by a black Kallmark.

"San Marco heard my prayer, Cousin Michael," cried the hunchback joyously. "I prayed right lustily and bravely while yonder giant of Magog was washing his hands i' the air and bobbing his head i' the wind and talking with the sun."

Bembo had been interested in the dawn prayer of the Muhammadan Tatar. He skipped to Michael's side and grimaced at the warrior.

"Now make what magic ye will, son of Eblis," he chanted, "and the devil take ye, as he will, for his own. Cousin Michael, did the mad Cham outroar you, or are we saved? What's to do?"

"Where are the others?"

Bembo could not forbear a chuckle. "Rest you, good cousin. The master-merchant Soranzi is counting a myriad gold coins for the Tatar *wazirs*, as the pagans name their money-tenders; Rudolfo is departed with good grace and Gian to be escorted by Tatar children to the river."

"And Clavijo?"

Bembo nodded toward the cage. "With the apes, who love him like a brother. This black giant was to cut off my head——"

"You will be safe with me. Come." Michael smiled. "The Cham, as you call him, has given us some good sport. We will fly pigeons and when that is done, sleep. Then this night will you see a rare jest, my Bembo."

"So said Rudolfo to Gian when they went off. Gian has been grinning like a dog that scents a bone. Two days agone did I ask them what was i' the wind. That was before they knew that you were with us in pagan garb. Rudolfo cursed me, but his henchman, forsooth, muttered that my master was not the only man who could devise a plan."

Michael frowned, but could learn nothing more from the jester, except that Rudolfo had talked at times with a certain *wazir* who was open-handed with his gold and knew many tongues.

He could not waste time to search into a possible new intrigue on the part of the Italian, for Tamerlane had ordered him to assist in preparing messages to be sent up with carrier-pigeons—messages intended to fall into the hands of Bayezid.

In the annals of the Ottoman dynasty it is written that during the space of that day Bayezid, surnamed the Thunderbolt, hunted with falcon and dogs upon the plain of Angora, having in his heart naught but contempt for the Tatars.

With his grandees and picked cavalry the sultan rode from sunrise to sunset, his beaters spread across the steppe, without thought of water or bodily comfort. His men stood under arms all that time. His ships in the river remained at their moorings. His spies reported that Tamerlane was taking more time to muster the Tatar horsemen to cross the river.

But Bayezid had burned and broken down the few bridges on the Khabur, and

knew well that, save at Angora, there was no ford. This gave him assurance that Tamerlane could not cross except at the point where the sultan awaited him.

Further assurance came with a carrier-pigeon, struck down by one of Bayezid's hawks. From the bird was taken a message addressed to the court of Samarkand, saying that Tamerlane would that night cross the Khabur and crush the Ottoman army.

Whereupon Bayezid retired to the palace by the lake at Angora, hearing fresh news at sunset that the Tatars were assembling in their ranks.

So Bayezid feasted and received praise from the leaders of the Moslem world.

"The beast," he said, "may see the trap; yet, being a beast, he has no wit to do aught but charge upon the bait."

"Nay," amended his advisers, "where else could the Tatar cross the river, having no bridges or boats?"

Well into the night a tumult arose on the shore opposite Angora. Many lights were to be seen in the camp of Tamerlane and the neighing of horses could be heard clearly across the river. Soon came the ring of weapons and the shout of the Mongols. A line of fire grew along the waiting galleys. Flights of arrows sped into the masses that were moving toward the ford. Bayezid laughed, well content.

Rumors reached him from fishermen that Mongols had been seen far down the river, but Bayezid could see and hear the conflict that was beginning at the ships. Moreover the torches of the Tatar camp were plainly to be seen.

It is written likewise in his annals that at this time a Christian captive, escaping from Tamerlane's camp, swam the river.

This man, who was attended by another Frank of powerful build, was taken captive by guards at the Khabur shore and carried up into the town where the officers of the Janisseries had assembled near Bayezid.

The two were Rudolfo and Gian, who had discarded their mail and broken loose from the half-grown Tatars, slaying one with their hands—so stoutly had the boys pestered them with miniature weapons.

Once safely in the town, they made signs that they would be taken to the sultan and offered as proof of the urgency of their mission a ring that bore the signet of a Turkish *wazir*.

When the litter of the sultan passed, attended by torches and mounted grandees, Rudolfo and Gian knelt. Bayezid halted. He examined the ring and his brows went up. It was the signet of one of his spies.

"Where is the *wazir?*" he demanded of the Greeks in his retinue who could converse with Rudolfo. The *wazir* who was the sultan's man had not been able to leave his post in the Horde without discovery and he had sent the ring by Rudolfo, who was prepared to seek reward from Bayezid for information given.

"'Tis small gain I seek from the Thunderbolt," he assured the Greeks. "Some gold and goods of mine taken from me by Tamerlane, who is a foul fiend. Lists have been prepared of the stuff and when the sultan overwhelms the camp of the Horde I will point it out. For this small gear I have tidings for the ear of the sultan."

Meanwhile up from the river-front came the clash of steel and the shouting of men. Bayezid, never impatient, scanned Rudolfo's face and observed that the man did not meet his eye. "More like," he whispered to the Sheikh of Rum, "that this Frank has had the slaying of my spy and has come to beguile me with words of Tamerlane's. Promise him his gold and get his news."

Rudolfo's message caused a stir throughout the grandees.

Tamerlane, he said, had left the camp across the river at dusk with the bulk of his cavalry, which meant the bulk of his army. The demonstration at the ford was being made by old men and boys—slaves, and horse-herders. The array of fires that winked at Angora from the other shore had been lighted to deceive the sultan into thinking that the mass of the Horde was still there.

As he spoke the tumult seemed to dwindle, and for a second doubt was written on the hard face of the Thunderbolt.

"If the Tatar has tricked me—" He thought of his preparations to defend Angora on the river side and the men he had thrown into ships and trenches on the shore.

"But there are no bridges and no fords," his councilors pointed out. "Where else could Tamerlane cross the Khabur? Perhaps he was fleeing with his army."

Bayezid had never met defeat. Astrologers had assured him that the greatest event of his destiny was to come to pass. He felt sure of his plan and of himself. Had not

his hunters' falcons struck down a carrier-pigeon that day with news of Tamerlane's purpose to attack?

So Bayezid laughed and questioned Rudolfo lightly as to which way the Tatar riders had passed from the camp. When Rudolfo replied that they had headed down the river, the sultan gave orders that a detachment of Mamelukes should ride down the Angora side of the Khabur and report if they sighted any Tatars. Meanwhile the two Franks were to be kept in attendance on him, for they would be useful.

The scouts never returned. Quiet settled upon the Khabur.

Some hours after dawn a Turkish war-galley was sent down the river to reconnoiter. So it was after midday that the vessel arrived at a point a dozen miles down the river and learned that here during the night the Horde had crossed the Khabur to the Angora side—the Tatars swimming their horses and the foot-soldiers holding to the beasts' tails.

Tamerlane, in fact, was now drawn up on the Angora plain with all his strength.

XIII

THE CONQUEROR

BEMBO had secured for himself one of those animals of the Kallmark Tatars, a beast that was neither horse nor mule nor ass. This steed he had caparisoned gaily. Thus mounted, he trotted at Michael's side, discoursing cheerfully.

"A fair day, my cousin, and a goodly steed between my knees—albeit it savors not of bull-stag or cameleopard. Alack, my wooden sword is broken; yet I have got me another weapon which is a favorite among these barbarians."

Michael, clad in a mail shirt with a Tatar helmet on his head and mace and sword at his belt, glanced down inquiringly. He did not see that Bembo carried any weapon.

"Nay, it is invisible, good my cousin," chattered the jester. "I learned its use in the Venetian fields and it likes me well because it avails best at a distance from my foe—ha! Are devils loosed on the plain yonder?"

A distant clamor of horns and drums came to their ears. Michael had taken his position among a regiment of Chatagai horse commanded by Mirza Rustem, the grandson of Tamerlane—a strong-bodied youth in rich armor. Directly behind them the standard of the Genghis family was raised, the yak-tail standard of the Mongols.

"The Ottoman attacks," explained Michael, rising in his short stirrups. "Bayezid has been maneuvering throughout the morning, and now his front ranks advance upon the Horde."

The plateau of Angora was nearly flat. The field favored neither Tatar nor Turk, except that Tamerlane had his left upon the river. Michael could see the masses of Moslem spearmen that had acted as beaters the day before, and other brilliant groups of irregulars—archers on either flank. Behind these, almost concealed in the dust that floated up from the hard clay, were Mamelukes, closely packed, and beside them the glint of lances of the Sipahis.

Bayezid, taken in flank by the swift move of the Tatar horde, had been compelled to realine his troops that morning and draw out of Angora, away from his galleys and trenches, to give battle. He had no other course open to him except to retire since Tamerlane refused to advance from the river.

There was no outcry from the Tatars. They waited as they stood. They flooded the yellow plain like bees clustered upon a board. And like an army of locusts was the advancing host of the sultan, fatigued by continuous marching, and tormented by thirst, but high-spirited and conscious of a hundred victories.

Michael's dark face was grave as he scanned their ranks—a hundred thousand souls, hitherto invincible, moving forward in the shape of a half-moon to the sound of their horns, Seljuke shouting to Ottoman, Turkoman to Mameluke. He knew the fighting ability of these veterans and was more than a little surprized at the calm alertness of the Tatars, not knowing that every Mongol shared the reckless spirit of Tamerlane, and would rather fight than eat.

"A thirsty sight," murmured Bembo, quaffing heartily of one of his skins of water. The day before, Tamerlane had ordered that each man be supplied with two such skins of water.

Emptying the goat's hide, Bembo dismounted to pluck stones from the ground, surveying each with care and throwing away all that were not round and of a certain size.

Michael looked up as arrows began to fly in dense clouds from the sultan's skirmishers. The front ranks of the Tatars took this punishment without cry or movement. By now the Turkish regiments of mailed horsemen could be plainly seen, moving forward at a trot.

Then the sun glinted on ten thousand arrows loosed at the same moment by the Mongol archers who shot three times while one shaft was in the air. The clamor among the Turks shrilled with shouts of pain and anger. Horses broke from the front lines, and the curtain of dust swelled so that it covered the scene of the battle from view from the rear where Michael and the Chatagais stood with picked regiments of Iran and the Tatar steppe.

The roar of voices merged with a pandemonium of clashing steel and thud of horses' hoofs. The tumult swelled until they could no longer hear their own voices.

Stationary at first, the brunt of the battle began to move onward toward the waiting masses of Tamerlane's horse, under Mahmoud Khan and the Lame Conqueror himself—the center of the army that was between the foot-soldiers and the cavalry in reserve, where Michael was.

"Bayezid's mongrel skirmishers have been killed off," he mused, "and his Sipahis are at work."

Even Bembo looked a trifle downcast. He glanced at the glittering figure of Mirza Rustem seated on a black stallion near them. The grandson of Tamerlane was chewing dates.

Plucking up his spirits at this sight, the jester took some fruit from his girdle and tried to follow the mirza's example. But he gagged and coughed up the food, thereby raising a laugh from Michael and the nearest Tatars.

A hot wind tossed the dust clouds high overhead and the glare of the sun pierced sullenly through the murk.

"*Hai—Allah—hail*" the deep shout of the Janisseries came to them.

Mirza Rustem finished his dates and began to eat dried meat that he pulled from under his saddle where the heat and the chafing of the leather had softened the stiffened meat. Bembo, watching in fascination, found the sight too much for his stomach and turned to look at the masses of Tatars before them.

Tamerlane, his standard and Mahmoud Khan were no longer to be seen.

The red ball of the sun, high overhead when the conflict began, was lowering to the west.

A leaping, furtive form passed the jester's vision, like an incarnation of evil. One of Tamerlane's hunting-leopards had escaped from its cage. No one paid heed to it.

Bembo began to tremble, and found that the perspiration that soaked his garments was cold. The hideous din in front of him had dwindled for a space and now swelled again until it seemed to embrace the horizon.

He looked for captives to be led back, but none came. Surely, he thought, there would be wounded Tatars running from the front, and others not wounded who had escaped the eye of their leaders. That had been a familiar sight in the orderly battles of Europe.

"The Mongols fight each man for himself," grunted Michael impatiently. "They do not keep lines as we do; that is why Bayezid has not broken their center yet. Tamerlane's cavalry met the charge of the Janisseries——"

He rose in his stirrups, looking eagerly over the field. He could make out that the two armies were engaged from wing to wing. The Turkish half-moon was no longer clearly drawn and the bodies of reserve cavalry behind the half-moon had been brought up into the line of battle.

Unconsciously Michael had edged his horse up abreast of the stocky pony of Mirza Rustem. Now he felt an iron hand seize his bridle and draw it back.

Looking into the eyes of Tamerlane's grandson, he found them cold and spiritless. The Breton was flushed and impatient as a hunting-dog held in leash. But there was no fire in the glance of Mirza Rustem who gazed upon the death of thirty thousand men with utter indifference.

"Do you fight for your God?" asked the Tatar.

"As you for your khan."

Mirza Rustem turned to glance fleetingly at where he could make out the yak-tail standard in the black mass of the Tatar center.

"Aye," he said slowly, "yet your God is gold, no more. A *wazir* spy of the sultan confessed before we beheaded him this day that a Christian had gone over to the enemy

for gold. That is the word that is ever in the mouths of your breed."

Michael stiffened, knowing that Rudolfo must have tried to betray the plans of Tamerlane. He thought, too, of the mercenary Comneni, of the grasping emperor and the Venetians who had sent to plunder the khan.

Then there came to his mind the vision of the chivalry of France who had thrown away their lives with reckless bravery in the crusade against Bayezid. And he thought of the Christian graves that marked the cities of Palestine where the knights of the cross had struggled vainly with the conquering Saracen.

This he did not try to explain to the Tatar, knowing that it was useless.

"See," said the young Tatar again; "the standard advances. The wolf has shaken the dogs from his flanks."

Michael saw that the masses of Tatars that had been stationary were moving forward now. It was almost imperceptible at first, this hive-like movement of men waiting grimly to slay.

Tamerlane's center had stood fast for three hours. Bayezid's last attack had been broken.

What the chivalry of Europe could not do, the Lame Conqueror and his Horde had done. To Michael this was a strange thing. Where was then the power of God?

Hunger and the nervous suspense of the last hours had made his mind clear and unnaturally alert. He found that he was dwelling upon some words of a woman who had taught him wisdom before he became a man.

"The ways of God are past our knowing," his mother had said.

He wondered if she were reading from the Book wherein she had found these words, and smiling as she did, alone in her room in the tower of the seacoast. She had smiled like that when his father's ships brought in word of new conquests of the Moslems on the borders of Europe.

It did not seem to Michael to be a strange thing that the strongest faith should be in the hearts of women, who knew nothing of warfare.

This had passed through his thoughts almost subconsciously while he watched the battle. Now the dust curtain thickened, cutting off his view. There was a pounding of hoofs and shapes that looked like birds crossed in front of Mirza Rustem and a man shouted something. Then they were gone, wheeling toward the Mongol right. Michael spoke to a Tatar squatted upon the ground sharpening his sword.

"Beduins—our men," he announced to Bembo, a new note of eagerness in his voice. "Be of good cheer, cousin esquire. Five regiments of Sipahis have been surrounded and are doomed in yonder mêlée. The Janisseries are reforming. Presently will we, God willing, bear our hand to the fray."

"I am well content here," rejoined Bembo sincerely. "San Marco——"

Almost at his ear a hideous clamor of kettle-drums and cymbals broke out. The jester clapped his hands to his head, only to see the standard of Mirza Rustem raised and the masses of Tatar horsemen move forward at a walk.

Michael touched spurs to his pony and Bembo sighed deeply. He looked longingly toward the rear where the leopard had fled, only to see lines of broad grim faces advancing and shaggy horses swarming together like bees.

THE sound of the Tatar *nacars* throbbed over the plain of Angora, summoning the Mongols to attack.

Whereupon every warrior of Tamerlane who could hold himself upon his feet ran or galloped forward. Some, who could not stand unaided, grasped the stirrups of the riders and struck out with their free arms.

And it was upon the checked and disheartened array of the Janisseries, ordered to charge a second time, that the Horde advanced. Defeated on both flanks, half his men slaughtered, and half of the rest staggering from wounds or thirst, the Thunderbolt ordered the flower of his veteran host to drive again at Tamerlane's center —only to be met by the picked horsemen of the Mongols, held in reserve until then under Mirza Rustem.

The Janisseries, shouting their war-cry, met the oncoming tide, wavered and broke up into scattered squares that melted away into mounds of dying and dead.

Michael, fighting beside the Chatagais, glimpsed the body of Gutchluk outstretched on the earth beside a mangled horse. The long hair of the Tatar was matted with blood and his black eyes stared up blindly at the passing riders.

Then through the dust Michael made out

the *noyan* who had been called a prince of Eblis by Bembo. The armor of the noble was cut and hacked away and one hand held together his nearly severed abdomen. He was seated on a heap of sprawling Sipahis, and he was smiling. The dead lay thick about him, for the Sheikh of Rum had penetrated here into the center of Tamerlane's host.

The Chatagais were galloping now, enveloping and sweeping over detachments of white-capped Janisseries. The remnants of a regiment of Turkomans, kin to the Tatars, threw down their arms and were spared.

"Bayezid is in flight to Angora with his grandees," cried Mirza Rustem. "We must not return without him."

The grandson of Tamerlane staggered in his saddle as an arrow embedded itself in his mailed chest. He dropped his shield to break off the end of the shaft. Michael slew the archer who had sent the arrow, and presently found himself riding alone through the dust clouds.

There he turned aside to follow a horseman who had entered a rocky defile at a headlong pace. The aspect of the man was familiar.

"Rudolfo!" he cried.

He had known some hours before that the *condottiere* had escaped from the guard of Tatar boys, slaying one in his flight to the river. But Michael had not thought until informed by Mirza Rustem that Rudolfo had sought protection and reward from the sultan.

Rudolfo, in fact, had been kept beside the retinue of Bayezid until there were no longer any to guard him. Then with Gian he had circled the remnants of the Turkish regiments to seek safety in flight.

He knew that his life was forfeited to the Tatars. It seemed incomprehensible to him that Bayezid should be routed. It was part of the ill fortune that had dogged him since the Gate of Shadows.

So panic—the panic that had seized him at Nicopolis—claimed him, and he turned into the first ravine that offered shelter. Michael's shout caused him to glance back swiftly.

He saw that the Breton rode alone. In the fear that beset him, Rudolfo felt that his only chance of life lay in slaying Michael. The issue between the two had been long in coming to a head. Now, Rudolfo thought, it was at hand.

The *condottiere* checked his horse and flung his javelin deftly. The spear missed the Breton but struck his mount, causing the beast to rear and plunge. Michael jumped to earth and hurled his mace.

It crashed against Rudolfo's round shield of rhinoceros hide, and the man winced as he dropped the crushed target from an injured arm.

He reached for his sword, but Michael was on him, had grasped him about the waist and hauled him from his saddle.

"Now may we settle the issue of our duel," muttered Michael, stepping back and drawing his weapon.

They had, in fact, strange weapons. Both had been deprived of the swords they had brought from Venice. The curved simitars felt strange in their hands. Rudolfo hung back, shaking the sweat from his eyes and gazing sidelong at the rocky defile in which they stood.

"Gian!" he cried. "To me!"

Michael waited for no more but leaped forward, slashing at the other's head. Rudolfo parried skilfully, calling again for his follower.

Out of the corner of his eye Michael saw the tall figure of the man-at-arms on a panting horse. Gian had been following them.

At this Michael set his back to a rock, warding off the counter-thrust of Rudolfo, who pressed the attack, certain now of the presence of his ally. Gian plucked forth a long knife and held it by the tip, reining his horse nearer for an opportunity to cast his favorite weapon.

Michael heard rapid hoof-beats approaching down the ravine. He caught the flash of the dagger as it flew toward him, only to rattle harmlessly off the rock at his back.

Gian grunted and flung up both arms, reeled in the saddle and tumbled to the ground. But Michael had not seen the thing that struck him down.

"*Habet!*" a shrill voice chanted. "Goliath is dead! Stand aside, Cousin Michael, and let the other devil have his due."

By now Michael was aware of Bembo on his mule-ass, waving something about his head.

"Nay," the Breton growled; "this is my affair."

The fall of Gian had brought a scowl to Rudolfo's olive face. He pressed Michael desperately, cursing under his breath. The two simitars clashed and the helmet was

struck from the Breton's head. Rudolfo, panting, exerted every effort to follow up his success and reach his enemy's bare skull. Michael was taunting him softly.

As Rudolfo's blow fell Michael sprang forward dropping his sword. The other's simitar passed over his shoulder and Michael's powerful left hand caught the other's wrist, pinning it to his side.

At this the Italian grinned maliciously, for, with his enemy's left hand occupied, he fancied that Michael was defenseless. So Rudolfo gripped Michael's throat, bending his head back viciously with his free hand.

Somewhat he wondered at Michael's passivity, not knowing that the Breton's right hand, useful once more, thanks to long and patient practise, was feeling in his own girdle for the dagger Rudolfo carried.

Michael's searching fingers freed the dagger and plunged it into the other's throat, over the mail.

Sword in hand, Rudolfo swayed on his feet, choked and wheeled about as if to run. His knees sank under him and he blundered against a rock, falling heavily upon his back. Both his hands gripped the hilt of the dagger, strained at it and were still.

Bembo, having dismounted, bent over the *condottiere* and ripped off the bulging pouch that was tied to the dead man's waist. Michael saw for the first time that the jester held a long sling, made of thin strips of leather, a stone ready in the pocket. Catching his glance, the jester laughed.

"My weapon," he said proudly. "Gian's thick head was cracked like a hen's egg. Gian's thick purse was full of gold trinkets, plundered, methinks, from the slain. So I would fain crack open his master's nest-egg —"

From Rudolfo's pouch a stream of Turkish gold bezants poured forth.

"*Consummatum est*," murmured Bembo. "It is finished. Gian's spoil will pay me for saving your life, coz. These belong to you."

As Michael shook his head, the jester, nothing loath, poured the coins into his goatskin, after emptying out the remaining stones.

Breathing deeply from his effort, Michael gazed around at the shadows of the ravine and listened in vain for the war-cry of the Tatars.

"You will not hear it, coz," remarked Bembo. "What is left of the grandees is flying toward Angora with worthy Mirza Rustem in hot pursuit. The victory is ours, as I prayed San Marco it should be."

He tied up the sack and surveyed Rudolfo philosophically.

"Cousin Michael," he declared thoughtfully, "you are a wise man. In Venice did you assert that a man follows his bent. And here is Rudolfo, a noble seller of himself, a *condottiere* to the king's taste. He sold himself to Genoa, then Venice, then back to himself again. Last night he traded him to the sultan, and now methinks he has gone to purgatory to sell his soul to the devil."

Out on the plain of Angora the sun had set over the red mist and the red dust where the bodies of fifty thousand men lay motionless.

It was night when Michael and his follower sought Mirza Rustem and Tamerlane in the town of Angora. They knew that where the khan was, the sultan would be. Men had told them that Bayezid had been taken before he could leave the field and that a hundred of his grandees had died around him before he could be taken.

Torches borne by the Tatars and the glare of building tents revealed to Michael a strange sight. Tamerlane sat his horse at the entrance to the pleasure lake of the palace. Mirza Rustem in bloodied armor and the scarred, dust-coated *noyans* attended him.

Huddled groups of women and slaves stared in a kind of fascination at what stood before the old Tatar. Pushing past the onlookers to the side of Mirza Rustem, Michael saw the great bulk of Bayezid kneeling in front of Tamerlane's horse.

The sultan wore his embroidered cap with the blood-colored ruby, and his tunic of cloth-of-gold. His head swayed on his shoulders and his eyes were half-closed. His glance went from one to another of the *noyans* and finally rested on Michael.

The black eyes of the defeated monarch widened as he recognized the Christian who had been his slave. His lips twisted as he half-made a gesture of appeal, and then drew back before the passionless scrutiny of the Tatars.

Michael folded his arms and waited, to hear Tamerlane's word that would speak

the fate of the man who was called the Thunderbolt.

"Live—if you can," said the old Conqueror gruffly.

He signed to a group of his followers who brought out a cage that had held one of Tamerlane's leopards.

In this cage Bayezid was placed and the door locked. He could no longer look into the eyes of the watchers as he was picked up, with his prison, and carried through the flame-ridden streets of Angora.

Somewhere in the huddle of captives a woman screamed and the other Moslems took up the wail of lament.

But Michael did not accept it for himself, giving it, instead, to a friend. He turned his back on the East to seek a galley bound for the Brittany he had not seen for ten years and the castle where his mother waited.

So it happened that the *bailios* of Contarini and the Maritime Council of the Signory of Venice reported a curious thing.

In the heart of Tatary, they said, sometimes called the land of Gog and Magog, not far from the Salt Sea, there was a fine palace in fair groves of date and cypress trees.

The ruler of this palace of Fars was a weird man, with emerald rings on his toes and cloth-of-gold on his broken body. He called himself sometimes the Grand Cham or Khan, and sometimes Bembo the First.

NEWS of what had come to pass in Asia spread to the world of Christendom. The wave of Ottoman invasion had been broken. In his marble palace standing over the dark waters of the Golden Gate, the Byzantine Emperor held revelry to celebrate the delivery of Constantinople.

The crusaders of Saint John took new heart; the pilgrim galleys that sailed from Venice were filled with new voyagers to the Holy Land. *Te Deum* was sung in the cathedrals of France. But no mention reached France of the share in the victory of Angora that belonged to an obscure voyager of Brittany. Nor did the mother of Michael Bearn hear the name of her son in the mouths of pilgrims.

The Maritime Council of Venice planned new inroads into the field of Oriental trade, and wrote off the moneys advanced to Signor Clavijo and his party as a total loss. In fact it was recorded in the annals of the council that Clavijo and all those with him were lost.

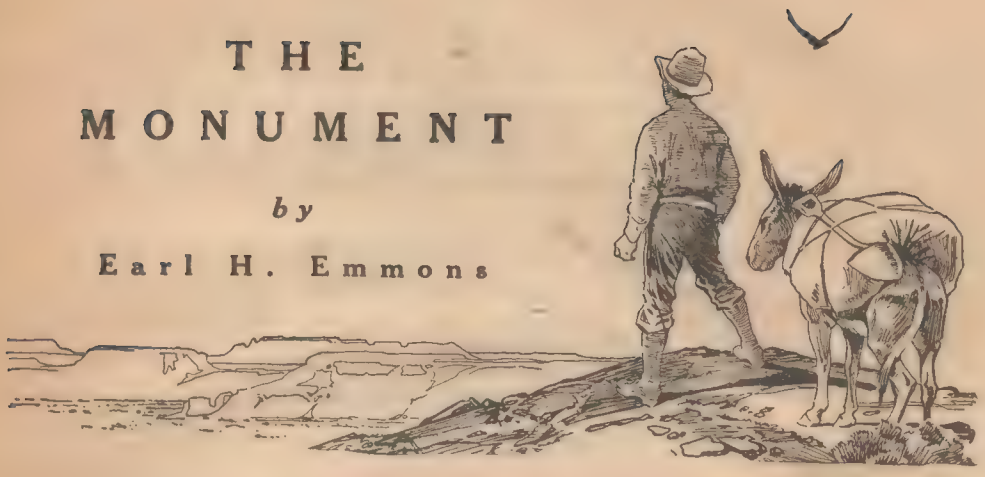
This, however, was not the case. Clavijo lived—outside the knowledge of the council that he dreaded—in Spain and wrote a book of his travels that was filled with most marvelous tales.

And Tamerlane rewarded Michael Bearn. The Tatar monarch bestowed on him a khanate in northern Persia—Fars, with its palace and riches.

THE MONUMENT

by

Earl H. Emmons



IN THE heart of the Black Hills Forest,
Near the top of the big divide,
By a worn-out trail is a lonely grave
On a somber mountain-side,
Where a one-eyed man was murdered
And a bob-tailed burro died.

It was during the golden fever
He descended upon the camp
With his bob-tailed donk and a pack of junk
And the general air of a tramp,
With his tattered rags and his grizzly hair
And a limp and an absent lamp.

Well, we snickered to see him packin'
And we watched him go with a grin,
And we plumb forgot in a day or two
Till we see him staggerin' in
After seven weeks with a load of dirt
That would waller a saint in sin.

Well, he caches his dust and beats it
For the rest of the pile, it's said;
But he don't come back, so we go to look,
And we find him cold and dead,
With a couple o' holes through the gizzard
And the top blowed offen his head.

So we planted him there in the forest,
And we know it's a howlin' shame,
But we can't put a thing on his lonely grave,
'Cause there's none of us knows his name,
Nor a thing of his friends or relations,
Or the country from where he came.

And the sober-eyed, bob-tailed burro
Hung around with a mournful air,
While we finished our work, but when all was done
Still the donk wouldn't budge a hair;
So at last we unbuckled his trappin's
And we left him a-standin' there.

Well, it's maybe six years or longer
When I happen to pass the spot,
And I give a look and my hat comes off
And I'm all choked up and hot,
For the grave has at last a marker
Of a kind that ain't made or bought.

Yes, it's only a bony old carcass,
And I'm maybe a danged old fool,
But to me there was never a tombstone
That was builded by hand or tool,
That could half compare with the bleached-out bones
Of that bob-tailed burro-mule.

And I think I could go plumb peaceful
And be happy and satisfied
With a stone that meant half as much as them bones
By the grave on the mountain-side
Where a one-eyed man was murdered
And a bob-tailed burro died.

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ALL of us have for so long associated W. C. Tuttle with humorous stories that when he turns around and writes serious stories instead we sort of have to begin all over again. As your letters and your annual votes have shown for years, his funny stories have been prime favorites with the vast majority of you.

A minority didn't like 'em "a-tall," but that is the case with any humorous story. Some wrote in and explained that real cowboys are not like those in "Tut's" funny stories. They're not. Neither is real life like farce and if you try to make farce like real life it is no longer farce. Some even charged that Mr. Tuttle had never even seen the West. On the contrary, he has never been east of Montana and was born and raised among the people he writes about. His father was sheriff of Dawson County, Montana.

I'M AMONG the majority who have enjoyed his funny stories, but right here and now I want to say that I'm even stronger for his serious stories. It's not Camp-Fire custom for me to talk in praise for any of our writers and I'm bringing this matter up only because I don't want any of the minority who may not read his funny stories to overlook the fact that W. C. Tuttle is doing an entirely different kind of story now and that they're likely to miss something by not sampling the new kind for themselves.

Here's a word from him on the story in this issue:

Hollywood, California.

I know that Sun-Dog country. I can sit here and see Marlin City. It was the same little town where I outgrew my school desk. There isn't a character overdrawn. There are dozens of *Brick*. *King Cleeve* was my friend. *Bunty* was a saloonkeeper. He went West a few years ago. His nickname was Bunty—but not Blair. Another character in the story stood pat on five aces in a hundred-dollar-a-chip game, when the discard of one ace, would have left him the best hand in the deck (they did not play straight flushes) and would have won him a fortune. The character of *Topaz Tyler* was taken from a half-breed dandy, but I made *Topaz* a white man. *Limpy Squires* (real name) passed on a few years ago, but left few mourners. I think I get more real pleasure out of these stories than any one else, because I know the people. It kinda brings back days that are almost forgotten, and it is fun to paint 'em up again.—TUT.

DON'T forget that the orginal paintings of *Adventure* covers are for sale to the highest bidder. All covers for issues previous to that of February 3, 1920, have already been disposed of. Bids will be accepted on cover paintings published since that date, and on the first of next July the paintings bid for will be sent express collect to the highest bidders. No bid of less than ten dollars per cover will be considered. Send in your bid any time.

Adventure Camp-Fire Stations

HERE are a few letters from some of the Keepers of our growing system of Camp-Fire Stations—just samples, but some of them very suggestive of the possibilities that can be developed.

This looks like cooperation from our comrades of the Order of the Restless:

Cleveland, Ohio.

Would be pleased to have this office considered as a Camp-Fire Station and always open 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. except Sunday.

I believe this can be worked into a wonderful plan and am mailing out to Order of Restless members and prospective inquirers a suggestion to boost the Station idea and also use them as a rallying point for the boys.

It sure is a pleasure to read "Camp-Fire" and the letters from the boys.—WAYNE EBERLY.

The Petroleum Development Co.,
602 National City Building.

This is what a newspaper office can do—and does—as a Station:

Allendale, S. C.

Having been somewhat of a wanderer myself from Alaska to the Cape and in divers other regions of both hemispheres, your Camp-Fire stuff is naturally the first page I turn to whenever *Adventure* rolls my way.

The Station idea seems to be a good one and would be glad to form a Station here with your approval. Any "furriner" dropping in could have the run of the office, freedom of the town, etc.

We have a big bulletin-board which could be used at any time, also mail-boxes and could print special stationery or callers could help themselves to the office stationery and typewriters.

If such an arrangement is agreeable to you and you have the signs ready would be glad to affix same on arrival outside office. Could also run a standing line in paper at head of editorial column which might catch their eye farther up State.—E. N. CLARK, *The Tri-County Record*.

And here is the notice now appearing in the *Tri-County Record:*

***Adventure* Camp-Fire Stations**

In this section of the Carolinas the *Tri-County Record* office has been appointed as *Adventure* Camp-Fire Station. A register book for members will be kept, information cheerfully given on the South, the West, and Canada, a supply of official stationery always at call of members; in fact, fellow Adventurers who may be passing this way, the office typewriter and the keys of the town are yours.

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Looks as if you'd get a real greeting here too, from Ed L. Carson of our "Ask Adventure" staff:

Burlington, Washington.

Frankly, I can see no good reason why each and every "Ask Adventure" editor should not be the head of such a Station. I have had at least a dozen personal callers for "Ask Adventure" information and can not see wherein I have ever been inconvenienced in the least. We are all working to make *Adventure* so valuably different from any other publication that it will continue to be in a class by itself for all time. This granted, what better can we have than to have each and every reader feel that he has a personal friend in every man connected with the building up of the magazine?

Although I live a short distance from town my home can be easily found by inquiry and any Camp-Fire wanderer who would like to call on me would be made just as welcome as he deserved. I have no fears of being "stung" by the unworthy, but even if such a thing should happen I will take a chance on surviving the experience. It has been done before and I still keep my health.—ED. L. CARSON.

As his two letters show, this comrade has had to move his Station from Texas to Porto Rico:

Houston, Texas.

The writer is thirty-one years of age; native Texan; have had more or less experience since the age of eight as newsboy, Western Union messenger, cigar-stand clerk, dry-goods store cashier, bank bookkeeper-stenographer, railway claim agent, United States Inspector of Customs, United States

Immigrant Inspector, Mexican Border for five years, Major (dollar a year and I never took the dollar) American Red Cross and Land Scout down in the jungles of the State of Vera Cruz for an American oil company.

Have had my narrow escapes, hard times and good times. Member of the B. P. O. Elks; Federal Employees Union No. 35, of which I was President for two terms and delegate to National Convention at San Francisco, California, 1919. Have traveled some.

Have just returned to my old home, Houston, Texas, and am a civil service employee for City of Houston. Am desirous of locating a Camp-Fire Station in Houston, Texas, and will add a few rules of my own in the organization of an Adventure Club or Adventurers Club. One requirement will be that local members must have traveled in at least one foreign country or be engaged in an occupation more or less hazardous, affording adventure in a greater or lesser degree, with exception of cripples or disabled who feel the spirit and are not able to answer the call of the trail. I expect to get some good publicity out of our local dailies on this Club. If response enough is met in my call, monthly dues might be assessed sufficient to pay for an office room in one of the local skyscrapers as our clubroom. Am working out some ideas that I think good. Please send me a Station sign as soon as possible and all data you have. My Identification card went up 3000 feet in aeroplane, July 7, 1919, Brownsville, Texas. Same plane fell August 7, 1919, Eagle Pass, Texas, killing lieutenant and observer, plane burned: so the cards have wandered over the earth, up hgn and low.—M. B. Couch, Route 2, Box 189.

San Juan, Porto Rico.

P.S.—Have just organized the Federal Employees Union of San Juan, Porto Rico, and was elected President. We started with 20 members, one week later had 30 new members and now, ten days after organization, we have 75 members with lively membership race opening on February 1st and ending March 1st that we expect to enroll nearly 500 government employees, all departments except postoffice. As I am here permanently so far as I now know. *I am* another "Station" so put it on the list as being here. (P. O. Box 944) U. S. My box.

Matthew B. Couch,
U. S. Immigrant Inspector.

Sure. This is one of the biggest opportunities for development.

Bayonne, N. J.

I believe that it would help the Station work if the magazine could suggest to Camp-Fire members and other readers that it might be to their mutual advantage to get in touch with the Station Keeper in their vicinity. I realize that this is a rather delicate matter but know of no better way to get the readers together, and I feel sure that you will agree with me that if a local Camp-Fire club could be organized wherever there was a Station it could be made both interesting and enjoyable to the members.

I am very much interested in the Station work and if at any time there is anything that I can do that will help in any way, you can depend on me.—J. D. Gray.

Sorry we're not to have one yet in Siam, but we will some day—and all over the map. Here's hoping Doctor Ellis will start one at his permanent address.

1644 Surisak Road,
Bangkok, Siam.

I am watching development of the "Stations" suggestion. Personally think it a mighty good idea and only one thing keeps me from having it announced right now. That is, we may stay here only about six or eight months yet. If so, by the time it was announced we would be leaving.

We will know by April first whether we stay. If we do, then as soon as we get a permanent address we will start the Station. It can be made interesting and profitable for all *Adventure* people.—A. G. Ellis, M. D.

THIS Station ought to draw some "old-timer" visitors, for Colonel Strover is an "old-timer" himself, with years of experience in the West when it was young and the Army very busy.

Los Angeles, California.

I shall be glad to make our place a Camp-Fire Station and should be more than pleased to meet any wanderer who may come this way and swap experiences with him.—Col. Wm. Strover, Superintendent. Westlake Military School, Mount Washington.

Adventure of March eighteenth contains an article written by Amedee La V. Reyburn, Jr., in which the writer speaks of a rich silver mine on the Jicarilla Indian Reservation in Northwestern New Mexico and that a party searching for this mine was attacked by Apache Indians and wiped out.

I think too much of the magazine and especially of "Camp-Fire" to let this pass. In the first place there never were any Apache Indians in the northwestern part of New Mexico, and the Jicarilla Indian Reservation is in the southeastern part of New Mexico. That's quite a difference.

Mr. Benj. M. Blood has something to say about General Custer and speaks of his brilliant career as a military leader. The fact is that Custer was at the time of the massacre in bad standing at the War Department and on a visit to Washington, prior to the Sioux campaign, the Adjutant-General refused to receive him. This rankled in Custer's mind and undoubtedly influenced him to jeopardize the lives of his soldiers in an endeavor to gain a great victory and recover his good standing. Had Custer lived after the disastrous battle with the Sioux, he would have been court-martialed.

And now about the "Gila Monster." As far as I know, and I had some experience with the reptiles, he is not any more dangerous than a wasp or a bee or a rusty nail. It all depends upon a person's blood whether a wound made by the Gila Monster becomes dangerous. The Indians, however, dread him. His bite is vicious, though, like that of a snapping turtle.

About the remedy for snakebite, I agree with the writer, that the best remedy is coal oil or turpentine. But whoever heard of an Indian being overcome by rattlesnake-bite? Wherever the rattlesnake sojourns there is to be found the rattlesnake weed, which is resorted to by Indians, when, as often happens, they are bitten by a snake. It is a milkweed and is to be found wherever there are snakes (rattlesnakes). This was pointed out to me during the early eighties when campaigning against the

Apaches, and I have never seen it fail. As a matter of fact, the poison of rattlesnakes is not deadly if the ordinary precaution is taken soon after the bite.

In this connection I wish to say that I shall be glad to make our place a Camp-Fire Station and should be more than pleased to meet any wanderer who may come this way and swap experiences with him. Would be pleased to hear more from you on this subject.—Wm. Strover.

The above are only a few, merely to show the spirit in which the Keepers offer their Stations to all of us. You will find that most of them have "hit the trail" themselves and that the real wanderers among us are likely to run into some interesting swapping of experiences when they drop in.

If you are so situated that you can offer a Station to your comrades, come forward. At Camp-Fire we'll be glad to have any suggestions for building up the Stations into the possibilities open to them. There are already some new ideas to be discussed and we'll have them up soon for discussion.

The Station plan is here to stay. Do your share toward it.

SOME interesting facts from Captain Dingle about the real man back of his *Red Saunders* stories:

Bermuda.

Red Saunders was a real man. He's dead now, or at least I believe he is, because some seven years or so back I heard that he had been killed up the Malindi River in East Africa while on one of his customary expeditions to grapple with anything looking like a grafter, for the enforcement of a divvy-up of the graft.

I FIRST met him in Mahe, in the Seychelles Islands, and made a two-handed voyage with him in a little eighty-ton schooner, the *Black Pearl* of my stories about him, to the Crozets, in search of specie in a sunken ship, the *Strathmore*. We found the ship, but not the specie. Anyhow, during that voyage, I found a treasure greater than specie, for I got to know Kenneth Beauclerc Saunders, Eton and Oxford man, genial giant, terror to crooks and pompous petty officialdom alike, and a man who should have had his name near the top of any Roll of Fame his country had to inscribe, had he not been unfortunate enough to cause the death (in pure accident) of some society lizard during a house party horse-play.

Saunders, Red Saunders to all who knew him, possessed no supernatural powers; but he possessed a splendid body, with a splendid mind, and courage that I have never seen equaled. His one great power, instinct, merit—call it what you like—lay in the uncanny knack he had of snatching *opportunity*. And he never in his life quit trying while a mate, whether he liked him or not, was in danger. He'd save a man of his crew at risk of his own life and liberty, and then whip the oakum out of the man if he had been guilty of transgression against the simple ethics of the schooner.

WHILE I knew him I have had him pick me up by the neck in one hand, kick the eternal tar out of my bottom for some fool mistake, then stand two watches in one and make the coffee while I got over it. And now I am retaliating by writing him up for a bunch of Camp-Fire boys whom he would have been glad to bust in among with his big, genial smile and his *whole man* personality to take a back log beyond the blaze and listen to the yarns that are spun.

I have used him in many yarns now, and every one has made friends for him, though I believe most of the readers of these Saunders stories have no notion that they are reading about a real man, and none of them knows that every one of the stories in which he figures is molded around a real event in the life of Red Saunders.—A. E. Dingle.

HERE are the results of the readers' vote on the ten most popular stories in *Adventure* during 1920. As in previous years, we give also the ten ranking next in the vote. (S) stands for "serial," (N) for complete "novel," (n) for complete novelette, those unmarked being short stories.

Of course a vote of this kind is only a partial expression, being cast by only a minority of the total number of readers, but nevertheless it is both interesting and decidedly useful in helping us in the office fill the magazine with the kinds of story our readers like best.

1920 VOTE

S—Serial. N—Complete Novel. n-Novelette. s—Short Stories.

1	Wild Blood	S	5535	*Gordon Young*
2	The Bushfighters	N	4311	*Hugh Pendexter*
3	Storm Rovers	N	4104	*Gordon Young*
4	The Curved Sword	N	3509	*Harold Lamb*
5	L'Atlantide	S	3495	*Pierre Benoit*
6	Kings of the Missouri	S	3457	*Hugh Pendexter*
7	A Scout for Virginia	S	3186	*Hugh Pendexter*
8	The Master Plotter	s	3133	*Edgar Young*
9	The Law Comes to Singing River	N	3051	*Robert J. Horton*
10	The Long Trail	N	2981	*J. Allan Dunn*
11	The Gate Through the Mountain	S	2781	*Hugh Pendexter*
12	The War-Cloth	N	2487	*J. Allan Dunn*
13	Man to Man	S	1998	*Jackson Gregory*
14	Hashknife—Philanthropist	n	1972	*W. C. Tuttle*
15	The McIntosh	n	1813	*Charles Beadle*
16	The Messenger	n	1517	*W. C. Robertson and H. Bedford-Jones*
17	The Armadilho	s	1513	*Arthur O. Friel*
18	The Sun-God Trail	s	1459	*Edgar Young*
19	Wolves of the Air	N	1404	*Ranger Gull*
20	The Masterpiece of Death	N	1379	*Harold Lamb*

Of course there a good many factors that play a part in such a ranking of stories. A story read a month ago leaves on the mind a more vivid impression than does an equally good story read eleven months ago. A long story has the big advantage of size and weight over a short one. A story read next to an unusually good one is likely to suffer by comparison more than it deserves.

But, all in all, such a vote as ours furnishes an invaluable guide in helping the editors make our magazine provide the kinds of story our readers want.

As last year, we give also a list of the shorter stories by themselves. Those marked with a star are of less than ten thousand words; the others are of ten thousand to twenty thousand.

STORIES UNDER 20,000 WORDS.

Stories under 10,000 words marked with an asterisk.

1	The Master Plotter	3133	*Edgar Young*
2	Hashknife—Philanthropist	1972	*W. C. Tuttle*
3	The McIntosh	1813	*Charles Beadle*
4	The Messenger	1517	*W. C. Robertson and H. Bedford-Jones*
5	The Armadilho*	1513	*Arthur O. Friel*
6	The Sun-God Trail*	1459	*Edgar Young*
7	The Liar*	1189	*Capt. Dingle*
8	A Teacher of Etiquette*	1168	*E. S. Pladwell*
9	El Capitan Arrrnie*	1166	*Chester L. Saxby*
10	Promoting Polecat Perkins*	1001	*W. C. Tuttle*
11	One Weak Spot*	999	*Edgar Young*
12	Rich Crooks	891	*Gordon Young*
13	The Eighty-One*	756	*Hugh Fullerton*
14	Convoys Courageous*	729	*S. A. White*
15	Intrigue	651	*Robert J. Pearsall*
16	Blackmail*	624	*Gordon Young*
17	Lobo Simms	589	*Buck Connor*
18	Bowl of Alabaster	545	*Charles Beadle*
19	Road-Signs and a Nose-Ring	513	*Barry Scobee*
20	In the Dark*	509	*Lynn Montross*

The annual vote by readers is both interesting and valuable. Be making your selections for the vote on our 1921 stories. It's your chance to help in editing our magazine and to make its stories a bit more to your own personal taste.

FOLLOWING our custom, two new members of our writers' brigade rise and introduce themselves on the occasion of their first story in our magazine:

Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Upon being advised of the time-honored custom for *Adventure's* writers to introduce themselves, informally, by giving a brief sketch of their lives, we state:

That one of us is a native of Illinois; the other a native son of the West—of Colorado. The gentleman from Illinois, early in life, realized the wisdom of Mr. Greeley's advice, proceeded to follow it, and came West. He is now so imbued with the spirit of the West that he even enjoys wild Western movies.

The native son, having no Eastern ideas to live down, has led a care-free existence since being launched upon the sea of life; the only disagreeable feature of his career being the necessity of working hard enough to keep a couple of laps ahead of the high cost of living.

As to adventures, neither of us has experienced any, nor have we traveled widely; our adventures have been acquired at second-hand, by reading of the exciting doings of the other fellow. We belong to what the editor of a magazine, some time ago, termed "arm-chair adventurers."

Delving far into our past, even beyond our apple-stealing days, fails to reveal any occurrences which could even be considered exciting. Why, therefore, should we occupy valuable space in the Camp-Fire columns, with a sketch of our unexciting lives, when dozens of others can recount experiences and details of their lives which are really worth while.—Jesse O. Whitehead, Wm. E. Smith.

IT SORT of helps our self-respect to find instances in which the Indians, not white men, were the ones to blame. But we can't forget that, underneath it all, we were engaged in taking their country away from them. If we defend our own country we are patriots, even if some of us should be wrong in our methods or in given instances; when the Indians do this they are just Indians, even if their acts are generally justified by their own code.

No indeed, I'm not sending flowers to Cut Nose or blaming the boy avenger. Just trying to get a more general view of the matter. I'd probably feel much as comrade Harriman does if I'd been as close to things as he has.

Los Angeles, Cal.,
January 7, 1921.

Camp-Fire Brothers: Reading Camp-Fire in the January issue, I found the letter and poem contributed by Wiggins of Salem, Oregon. Noting his mention of my name, I take the matter up and tell what I know of the poem.

THE first thing which my memory ever recorded, was crossing Pleasant Lake at night, in my father's sailboat, with my mother, sister, three husky boy brothers and a baby brother; also, two neighbor women and five of their children. We were hurrying to the stockade.

This stockade had been built between the lake and a marshy pond, on a narrow sea-wall. In it we lodged until Little Crow was killed.

As a small, a very small boy, I heard women sing "Minnehaha." Later, I had a book called "The Dakota Warwhoop," in which the origin of the poem was given. This book was loaned by me to a neighbor in 1897 and found by me in a rubbish pile where he had thrown it, in 1913. It was falling apart and so discolored that it was worthless.

NELSON was left wifeless and childless by the Sioux raid. He enlisted and went out to help fight the savages, in Shelby's command. The company he was with came past his former home and Nelson paused to look; then, in a careful manner closed the garden gate. Garden, house and stable had all been wrecked by Indians, but the gate still swung. Nelson had lost his mind completely and had to be taken to an asylum.

This story was told and some person, I forget whether man or woman, wrote "Minnehaha" from that, putting it in quotations and making the gate incident a sort of parenthesis. It is my opinion that the cave-skeleton incident is pure fiction.

THAT hanging of the twenty-eight Sioux was only a small part of what should have happened. There were one hundred and—I think—ten convicted after a fair trial. Any man who lived in Minnesota at the time will say they all deserved hanging, but The Drunken Tailor, Andy Johnson, refused to allow any save those convicted of multiple murders to be hanged.

Old Cut Nose was one who was hanged. It was proved that at one time he climbed in a wagon and killed twelve women and children with a hatchet.

During this war, a farmer put his wife, her mother and five children in a wagon. He walked and drove the oxen. The oldest son, seventeen, came along behind, acting as scout. Indians shot the man and oxen, brained all the children and the grandmother, outraged the mother till she died.

The seventeen-year-old son went on the warpath. The last time he was ever seen, he came to St. Paul after amunition and had a conversation with an old friend of mine. In the privacy of the friend's room, he took from within his buckskin shirt a string of ninety-eight Sioux scalps.

"If they don't get me first, I'll make it two hundred, for what they did that day on the road," he said. But he was never seen again alive.

WHEN any man tells you the Sioux war of '62 and '63 was caused by acts of oppression by white men, tell them from me that it is a lie.

Little Crow was a younger son, not entitled to be chief. He schemed for power. His brothers opposed him. He made a feast and invited his six brothers. Then he and his friends killed all six while they gorged.

Then, in order to make his grip a solid one on the position, he began a war on the whites. This is not guess-work with me. It comes directly from the lips of a Sioux, two of them, who were friendly always.

Witness the opposition of Wabasha and Chaska and many others, who opposed Little Crow till his death, bought captives to release them, put on a bold front and dared Little Crow to attack Friendly Camp.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

P. S.: First line of "Minnehaha" should end "aye" and not ah. Meaning forever.

SOMETHING from Harold Lamb concerning his story in this issue:

Historically this battle—Angora—is pretty much as presented in the story. Likewise the events leading up to it.

Clavijo is an historic liar—see Hakluyt. I have touched up his native ability and advanced the date of his "embassy" a year or so, to get him into the battle. Incidentally, the episode of the ring belonging to Tamerlane is related in Hakluyt. Clavijo, it seems, was much taken aback at hearing that the Tatar's ring was reputed to change color when a falsehood was told. At the moment, Clavijo was telling some pretty tall fibs about the grandeur of Spain, and he shut up when he heard about the ring.—HAROLD LAMB.

YOU will, I think, concede that the championship is his. To protect him against giving, selling, exchanging or other things I've torn his name and address off his letter (and destroyed the pieces) before it goes to the composing-room, and as I handle some 10,000 letters a year and have a rotten memory anyhow, there's no use trying to identify him.

I believe I hold the championship for strange uses to which *Adventure* has been put. I have in my possession, and looking at me as I write, two quarts of pure cherry juice and ONE GALLON of pure blackberry juice. I do not care to describe the process through which they are going, but will say that some day in the near future I expect to have something better than most people are able to buy, at least buy legally. Well, the cover over one of the containers of this famous elixir is a copy of the February third issue of *Adventure*. I believe it is doing good service. No samples given nor sold nor exchanged.

A WORD from F. R. Bechdolt as to the authorities for the facts in his article in this issue:

Carmel, California.

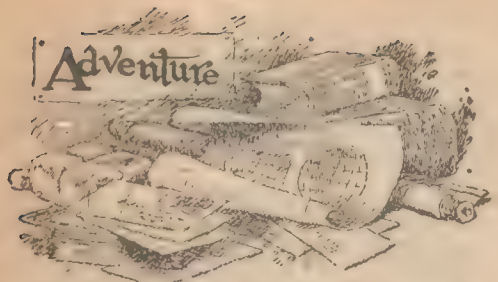
I enclose "Cochise," which tale is authentic. I got the data in many places, and some of it has come with two or three authorities for a single incident.

Captain Harry C. Wheeler, formerly in command of the Arizona rangers and latterly sheriff of Cochise County, Dr. D. T. MacDougal of the Carnegie Institute, and John Slaughter gave me much of the information. The country I know pretty well from having traveled over it, including the Stronghold. Bancroft's "History," Farrish's "History of Arizona" (published by the State of Arizona) and other recognized authorities will confirm the incidents as set forth here.—F. R. BECHDOLT.

WE HAVE a limited number of printed indexes for bound volumes of our magazine covering Vols. V to XVIII inclusive and Vols. XXIV to date inclusive. While they last we'll be glad to send these to any of you who ask for them. No charge, but since it's a friendly courtesy on our part it would seem only fair for you to enclose not only a stamp but a large size self-addressed envelope. If the indexes you want are exhausted by the time you write, your envelope will bring you only a statement to that effect, but I guess you ought to be willing to take that chance.

Of the above volumes we now have about 300 indexes each. We have no indexes of Vols. XIX to XXIII inclusive.

I know lots of you keep a file of our back issues and that quite a few have them bound and we're glad to give you the indexes to make your file handier for you.—A. S. H.



VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: All 1918; twenty-four copies. All 1919 except Mid-June; twenty-three copies. Jan., Feb., March, 1920. Fifteen cents per copy, postage prepaid.—Address HENRY WILLGARD, R. 5, Marion, Ill.

WILL SELL: 1918, 1919, 1920 for five dollars. Buyer to pay expressage.—Address H. H. NORTHRUP, Lock Box 29, North Freedom, Wisc.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

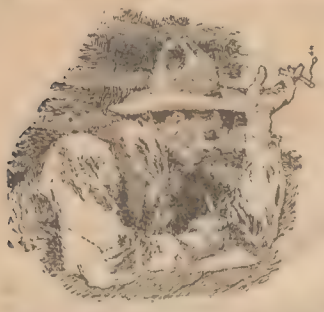
Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by [the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1209 Fifth Ave., Seattle, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next department.*)

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, Melbourne Beach, Fla. Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 West 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas, Oklahoma, and the border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. ★ Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Apartado 168, Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

13. North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern Ungava

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
T. E. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, Carmel, Calif. Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

20. North American Snow Countries Part 8
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power.

21. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

22. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, language, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

23. South America Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

24. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

25. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, trading, traveling.

26. Philippine Islands
(Editor to be appointed.) History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

27. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

28. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Petrograd and its province, Finland, northern Caucasus, Primorsk district, island of Sakhalien. Travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

29. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

30. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Morocco. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

31. Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

32. ★ Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

33. Africa Part 5 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

34. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

35. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Natives, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

36. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

WEAPONS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers including foreign and American makes. D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and advice; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Comm., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Mills' case 8 cents— in stamps NOT attached)*

New "Ask Adventure" Sections

IN ORDER that none of you may by any possibility overlook any bets, here's just a line to call your attention to five new sections added within the last few issues. See Sections 12, 16, 33 and 34 of the topographical department listed on pages 184 and 185; also Section C under "Weapons, Past and Present," page 185.

Canoeing the Great Lakes

HERE'S a good snappy vacation for somebody:

Question:—"I am thinking of taking a canoe trip from Lake Huron through St. Clair, Erie and Ontario to Trenton and then through the Trent Valley Canal to Georgian Bay and then home again on Lake Huron. Would I have much trouble getting through the canals and rapids? Do you know where I could get maps of the whole trip or part of it, especially the Trent Valley and Georgian Bay? I expect to take from the first of June till the end of September.

I have had several years' experience in lake cruising and sailing in a canoe around Lake Huron and St. Clair and adjacent rivers. My partner isn't fond of snakes, but I suppose there will be plenty of them, also flies and mosquitoes in the Trent Valley and Georgian Bay. Kindly give me advice on things to be guarded against and oblige very much."—C. P. STOREY, Sarnia, Ont., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—You will have no trouble, as far as I know, with canals and rapids; in fact you will find it good "sailing" all the way.

After you get past the falls at Niagara, *via* the canal, you will have a straight uninterrupted run to Trenton. From Trenton to Hastings there are eighteen locks, aggregating 370 feet of lift; and from Hastings to Lake Simcoe there are seventeen locks. But you will have no trouble or difficulty with these.

From Lake Simcoe to Georgian Bay is the only section that I am in doubt about. This section has been finished only recently, and I wouldn't care to state what condition it is in. Write the Orilla *Packet*, Orilla, Ont., Canada, for information on this section.

Local maps for any particular section are best obtained locally, and are more apt to be correct in minute detail. Maps of the Great Lakes section of your trip should be obtainable there in Sarnia; or any of the navigation companies will likely be able to supply you. Maps of the Trent Valley Canal will be obtainable in Trenton in the book-shops or stationery-stores.

Snakes? No, man. Snakes in Canada were never plentiful. There are but two of the poisonous kind native here—the moccasin and the rattler; and they are now scarce indeed. You will see perhaps an odd black snake in the quiet pools, lying on a log sunning himself, and a few garter and grass snakes. But that will be all.

Flies and mosquitoes will be bad, but you can take "dope" for them, and mosquito-netting, and build smudges and be quite comfortable. When paddling there is usually a breeze enough to keep away the insects, and at night your netting will protect you. Add a little carbolic acid to some Three-in-One Oil—just enough to perfume it—and you have a good dope for mosquitoes.

Your lake cruising will give you all the experience you need to guard against the squalls and storms of the big lakes. After you get into the Trent Valley Canal—between the lakes—there won't be any dangers, to guard against. Behave yourselves, that's all.

And don't cut standing timber for fuel and don't get "sassy" with lock-tenders. A good cigar and a smile will be worth dollars to you on a trip like this.

Rattlesnakes as Merchandise

THIS inquirer has the goods; all he wants now is the market:

Question:—"Having seen that you cover Texas and the Mexican border States in *Adventure*, I am writing you in the hopes that you will be able to supply me with the following information, unusual as it may sound.

Just a word of explanation before I go any further. I have been hunting and killing rattlesnakes for the past two years in this vicinity with favorable results. Their hides make excellent belts from a novelty standpoint; and although I have been able to extract quite a bit of oil from the fat in the snakes I have not sold any of it, giving it all away to rheumatic friends, who claim it is excellent stuff. The following are a list of questions I would be very pleased to have answered by you if through your travels and experiences you have picked it up.

What is the marketable value of pure rattlesnake oil? Is the poison of a rattlesnake in any way utilized by the medical profession, and if so what would be its probable value per liquid ounce?

Is there any known liquid or substance that will drive a rattler from his hole without ruining his hide? A smoke or gas for instance.

Is this liquid or substance within the means to justify its use from a commercial standpoint? About what time of the year is a rattler's hide in the best condition?

What is a good antidote in case of snake-bite? Do any of the States pay a bounty on rattlesnakes?

If you find these questions difficult through unfamiliarity with the subject, please advise me of the address of some authority on it, and oblige."—SGT. L. W. COLTON, Camp Stanley, Leon Springs, Texas.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—I have never paid much attention to rattlesnakes in a commercial sense, though I have heard of others that have. In the Panhandle section of Texas there is a rattlesnake farm which is making its owners wealthy by the extraction of the poison from the poison sac and selling it to some chemical manufacturing company. Large sums are received for small amounts of the poison.

The fats are also rendered into oil which is used for soreness and rheumatism, and I have used some on my boots. It is fine for the softening of leather and rendering it water-proof. Around a fire, though, the odor is not as sweet as that of flowers.

I am sorry that I have no more definite information on this subject—the study of rattlesnakes and

their usefulness is an unusual subject and there are few that have gone into the subject deeply.

A smoke made of greasewood will drive them out of their dens in most cases. A rattler dens up in the late Fall and stays in until the sun shines out warm in the Springtime. He comes out then, and as he is very poor his skin slips off easily. He is most dangerous at this time, for he strikes at the least noise without rattling. The skin slipping over his eyes keeps him blind for several days and also prevents his rattlers being heard. I have found May and June skins about the best.

I have been bitten several times and used tobacco-juice, cut out the teeth-prints and allowed the blood to flow freely for a short time, then cauterized the cut. Turpentine and kerosene are good to bathe the spot with. Call a doctor at once after your first aid.

I know of no bounty being given by any State in my section.

Here is a list of laboratories and manufacturing chemists that may be of some service to you directly or indirectly by telling you where to dispose of the poison.

1. Dermatological Research Laboratories, 1720-22 Lombard St., Philadelphia, Penna. 2. The Medical Research Laboratories, 25 E. Washington St., Chicago, Ill. 3. The Calco Chemical Co., Pharmaceutical Division, 136 Liberty St., New York City. 4. H. A. Metz Laboratories, Inc., 122 Hudson St., New York. 5. Lederle Antitoxin Laboratories, 511 Fifth Ave., New York.

How to Travel in Asia

BY THE time this meets your eye Gordon MacCreagh, the "Ask Adventure" editor who prepared the answer to the following question, will probably be far within the jungles of Brazil, movieizing the natives. Good luck to him, wherever he may be:

Question:—"I appeal to you for information concerning travel in southern Asia.

For some time I and a friend—another married woman—have been planning a trip around the world. This trip would have to be taken in the most economical way possible to be absolutely first-class. In the first place is it perfectly safe for two married women to make such a trip together?

The following is a rough outline of our route:

San Francisco to Yokohama, Tokio, Nagasaki to Shanghai, Hong Kong (probably Canton) to Saigon, Bangkok, Singapore, Rangoon to Madras (Jaypore if possible), probably Darjeeling, Benares, Agra, Delhi and Srinagar. Then I would like to go by land from here to Jerusalem, but the railroads seem to be so few—almost none—that I suppose I will have to sail from an Indian port about at the mouth of the Indus River through the Persian Gulf to the mouth of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. Where I would like to go would be Ispahan and Teheran, but I suppose these would have to be omitted. From the Persian Gulf port to Babylon, Bagdad, Nineveh, Damascus, Jerusalem to Jaffa; from here to Egypt, to Europe. But I have outlined the southern Asiatic part of the trip herein.

It is very hard to find out reliable information about Asiatic railroads and the fares on same, also boat passages from the above named ports. Most of the information that I have been able to obtain says that in India you have to carry your own bedding. Is this essential? Can't it be bought over there? Haven't they English stores in their large towns?

And haven't they English drug-stores?

Then how about the vaccins for plague, cholera and typhus? I suppose it is advisable to take these.

And the food—in the large places can't you get English food? And is the water drinkable, or can it be bought at a drug-store?

Can one take the trip speaking only English? And what do you suppose would be the price of such a trip, taking in Constantinople, Athens, Venice, Florence, Milan, Rome, Naples, Lucerne, Monte Carlo, Paris and London? And Egypt?

Of course I know that one can spend anything he desires; but doing it economically and first-class what would be the least that you would advise?

Any information would be very gratefully received—and any suggestions."—(MRS.) LILA BESS MORGAN, Montgomery, Ala.

Answer, by Mr. MacCreagh:—Regarding your proposed trip let me assure you first of all, since economy is to be a factor, that it will by no means be necessary to travel first-class on all the steam lines you take passage on. The B. L. line, as also the Bibby and the Nippon Yusan Kaisha, put up a very decent second-class accommodation which ladies can avail themselves of with perfect propriety and comfort. You would always have the privilege, of course, if, having booked a second-class passage, you did not like it, of paying the difference and getting immediately transferred to the first class.

All the places you mention, from Japan through Indo-China and the Straits Settlements to Burma and India, are well supplied with excellent railroad accommodation, and ladies alone can travel with perfect safety. I personally have in fact had the pleasure of escorting two ladies over all of Upper Burma.

And incidentally, since you mention Rangoon, let me urge you not to omit Mandalay and Pagan—and regret it for the rest of your lives. Rather leave out Rangoon and rush away immediately to Upper Burma; for it is there that the real beauty and the old civilization of the country are to be found.

I am sorry, though, that I am not in a position to tell you facts about railroad and steamship fares. These are changed and are still fluctuating so terribly that it is next to impossible to keep in touch. Let me suggest that you apply to Thomas Cook & Son, New York, for information about fares; they will be in as good a position to give you up-to-date information as anybody in this country.

Your plan to travel by land from Srinagar to Jerusalem I am afraid you must give up entirely. That is a route through country which is as wild as anything in all Asia and which two bold, experienced men might well balk at. I doubt indeed whether any two men could get through with their lives; their equipment would be too great a temptation to every respectable scoundrel in the country.

Your alternative plan to travel through the Mesopotamian Valley, while more feasible, would, I am afraid, be prohibited by the controlling British authorities on account of the unsettled condition resulting from the war. Let me suggest that you take in the Persian Gulf ports, Bagdad, Bandar-abbas, Jask, Linga, Busrah, wonderfully interesting places; and then take ship from Aden up the Red Sea to Port Said, from where it will be easy to make satisfactory arrangements to travel through the Holy Land, railroad most of the way.

Now as to the matter of accommodation on the Asiatic railroads. It is true that one must carry one's own bedding. But that is not such a hardship as it might seem. One carries sheets, a light blanket or two and a pillow all rolled into a canvas hold-all sort of thing.

A mattress is not necessary, because in the railway carriages the upholstery is ample, and in *dak bungalows*, or rest-houses, beds with a woven fabric are provided. Everybody carries these bedding-rolls, and accommodation is provided for them; your servant could look after the whole arrangement.

Oh, I wonder whether you realize that you would have to carry a servant with you? This is absolutely necessary; for there will occur endless things which a lady positively could not attend to herself. On steamboat trips a servant would not be necessary; but throughout your land trip through Indo-China, Burma and India you would just have to carry at least one female servant.

However, that would not be very expensive; for she would travel third-class with the privilege of entering your compartment in the railroad carriage to attend upon you. The pay of such a servant ought not to exceed ten dollars a month.

Don't worry about drinking-water. Wherever there is any sort of habitation the water is fit to drink though you may have to boil it sometimes.

Similarly about medicaments and vaccinations. At every port you will find most up-to-date medical service, and will be able to get all the local advice and inoculations that may be necessary. Throughout India and Burma particularly you will be overwhelmed with medical men of wide experience and splendid skill.

Similarly again about food. You will get very little else except English food; and you will buy American canned goods all round the globe. All your supplies, in fact, can be purchased locally at no great expense.

Lastly you can travel all over the universe speaking not a syllable that isn't English.

I am sorry that I can not help you as regards the cost of the trip, for the reason, as I said before, that fares fluctuate so much.

A Cree-English Dictionary

AS IN the case of so many other Indian tongues, Cree has been preserved as a written language through the efforts of devoted missionaries:

Question:—"I am English, and as telegraph lineman at House River (Grand Rapids) on the Athabasca River, I am very intimate with the Indians around.

I am writing to ask you if there is any book published to your knowledge that would enable me to learn the Cree language and writing. I have spent hours with Crees, with pencil and paper, trying to make out a list of Cree-English words and phrases, but seem to be able to get only a few down correct.

Could you please advise me as to this matter?

Also, if you know it, the route of the Yukon Telegraph Line."—E. J. BAYLISS, Athabasca Landing, Alta., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—Archbishop McKay, who lived for many years among the Indians, published a Cree-English dictionary some time ago, and by sending to the Church of England Synod offices, Winnipeg, Man., you should be able to get a copy. A Bible in the Cree language has also been printed and you should be able to get a copy of it from the same source.

I am afraid I can not give you any information regarding the route of the Yukon Telegraph Line, but by writing to our correspondent for that locality you should be able to get particulars.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to "Ask Adventure" editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

A Fall Hunting-Trip in Maine

IT'S NOT too early to be taking a look ahead:

Question:—"I am writing you with the request that you favor me by answering the following questions as per the "Ask Adventure" Department:

First. Where in Maine do you consider the best or most promising locality for a party of four to go hunting big game such as deer, moose, etc. We desire to go in the Fall of 1921.

Second. Would more than one guide be required for such a party? Can you give me the names of guides with addresses that I might write to? What pay do guides receive?

Third. Could the trip from here be made by automobile?

Fourth. The time required to make a hunt of this kind fairly successful. Would two weeks be sufficient?

Fifth. The cost somewhere near of such a trip, to be estimated after we arrived at the desired location. Now the main idea is that we want to go somewhere hunting next Fall that would be worth while; and any pointers or advice that you can give us concerning such a trip will be gratefully received by us."—R. E. BENSON, Springfield, Mass.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—There is a diversity of opinion as to where the best hunting-grounds in the State are situated; but if anything can be told by the shipments of game through the inspection stations there was more big game brought down from the southeastern part of Aroostook County than from any other section of the State.

I am enclosing a small map of the State with the territory marked with blue pencil. These sections are easily reached by the B. & A. R. R., and there

are plenty of sporting camps with competent guides to be had.

There are many good sections where game is plenty, but many are inaccessible, and it is a hard proposition to get it out to the railroad or a shipping-point.

The game laws require a guide for five people; that is, he can not guide more than that number at one time. As a rule many sports or hunters employ a guide until they get some idea of the country they are to hunt over; then they go alone. If a man is not used to the woods it is a safe plan not to go far from camp without a guide.

If you will write to the office of the Commissioner of Fisheries and Game, Augusta, I think they will send you a list of the registered guides in any section of the State. But they change so that I can not keep a list of them. The salary or pay of guides runs from $4 to $6 per day and expenses.

Yes, the trip could be made by auto to the sections I have marked.

I should say a party of four ought to be able to secure the limit of game in two weeks' time, say the last two weeks in October.

Now as to the expense. A first-class camp will probably charge from three to five dollars per day—possibly less this Fall. The guide will charge, say, six dollars; and his board will be another three dollars, so it will vary from five to fifteen per day, with a few incidentals.

It would be a good scheme to write me about a month before the game season opens, and I might be able to give you some good dope, as I anticipate being in the game country this Summer.

Send question direct to expert in charge—NOT to the magazine.

Knife-Throwing and Ax-Sticking

EASY enough when you know how:

Question:—I have read a number of stories in *Adventure* of characters who were knife-throwers and have seen it done in Barnum & Bailey's, but have often wondered how it was done. I can remember when I used to make darts with feathers in the end to carry them true, but don't know how a knife could be thrown to go true. I have always found that the haft was heavier than the blade."—MILO FAWCETT, Akron, O.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Did you ever play mumble-the-peg? Do you remember how you had to flip the knife over to stick it?

Throwing a knife is accomplished in almost that identical manner, only on a horizontal plane. As a boy I made myself a throwing-knife or dagger from a scrap of sheet-steel from a circular-saw factory. It tapered from an inch wide at the guard to three-eighths wide where the point began to grow in. The tip was rounded and sharp.

Throwing the knife and sticking axes were a common sport in the woods where I lived. In knife-throwing we always used a tree as target and at ten paces for the cleverest, five paces for beginners.

We usually marked across the tree at shoulder height and hip height and threw for this enclosed space. At first many would begin throwing at barely a yard beyond arm-length, stepping backward one pace at a time till they could stick the knife at full distance.

That is all there is to it. Just mumble-the-peg played at a mark and horizontally. We threw the hatchet in the same way.

In ax-sticking the object was to stick the ax by a whirling throw that carried it fifteen or twenty feet up a tree. I have stuck one at twenty-two feet from the ground.

Don't throw the knife with too much of a whirl. It should pass more than half-way to the target in its slow turn before the handle has begun to pass the lower center. Then the point comes on over in slow time and punctures the bull's-eye. Take blade by tip and cast it vigorously, with the tiniest of turning motion.

Put least five cents postage on all letters addressed to "Ask Adventure" editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

Diamond-Drilling

THIS correspondence was held before we had time to announce that Mr. Beadle, considering himself to be no longer in close touch with mining matters in his territory, had decided to forego that branch of his "Ask Adventure" work:

Question:—"I follow diamond-drilling and have an opportunity of a two-year contract in Belgian Congo. What advice and information you can supply would be appreciated.

1. Climate and probable altitude of mining-districts.
2. Mining; miscellaneous information.
3. Living-conditions.
4. Opportunities for adventure and sport."—ROBT. A. MCNEIL, Britannia Mines, B. C., Can.

Answer, by Mr. Beadle:—1. From the mining department I'm supposed to have resigned as I can not keep in touch with modern developments. But from what I recollect I should guess that your Belgian mines will probably be Kanshanshi on the Congo-Zambesi watershed or neighborhood. Altitude *about* 6,000 feet. A fine country with a splendid climate; never excessively hot and never cold; fresh or cool at night.

2. The only miscellaneous mining information I can give you is that in diamond-drilling in Africa one white runs several machines worked by natives.

3. Whites probably live there now—as the rail is there or near—in corrugated iron houses; otherwise in houses built of sun-dried bricks, or perhaps huts of mud and wattle; depends where it is, of course. Food mostly canned stuff varied with game, chickens, eggs, milk, etc.

4. Plenty of sport of all kinds, although in your particular district there may be little game; adventure lies with you and the gods.

Sorry that I can't be of more use.

Cape Hatteras and Her Fame

INCIDENTALLY to the asking and answering of a question, we gain an interesting sidelight on one peril our Atlantic battle-ship fleet faced during the late unpleasantness—an incident which I, at any rate, didn't see written up in the papers:

Question:—Through the medium of "Ask Adventure" I wish to ask a few sea-going questions. I will be pleased indeed for the answers of any one of them; and, well—the more the better.

1. Why do so many sea-faring men speak of Cape Hatteras as though they should be dreaded more than other dangerous waters? I realize fully why they may be dreaded, but wondered if there were any stories or legends of past shipwrecks which have added to its fame as one of the Atlantic's burying-grounds. What shipwrecks of note—if any—have occurred off Cape Hatteras?

During the late war I served with our Atlantic fleet, and the worst storms which I experienced were met off Cape Hatteras. In fact, during the month of January of 1918—I think it was—the Atlantic fleet passed through one of these storms in which almost all of the battle-ships lost both their wireless and trucks, as well as several small boats. One ship—the U. S. S. *Michigan*—lost its entire foremast, and five or seven seamen with it. Any one who is acquainted with a battle-ship at all can realize what a storm this must have been. On the following day the fleet looked as though it might have emerged from a modern naval battle.

2. Why do the seas almost always run high off Cape Hatteras?

3. Can you tell me the name of the lightship anchored off Cape Hatteras?—LLOYD KOHLER, Junction City, Kansas.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—In the matter of wrecks, there is not much to choose over a period of twenty years between Cape Sable, Barnegat Inlet and Hatteras. All these stretches are littered with wrecks. Hatteras gained a bad name in sailing-ship days, of course, when a ship, making the cape as a landfall, was caught on a lee shore and driven ashore on Diamond Shoals. This, by the way, answers your query as to the name of the light off Hatteras. Diamond Shoal Lightship.

The high seas off the cape are due to the sudden offthrust of the Gulf Stream by the jutting-out of the land, and the sudden change of wind from the prevailing quarter—S. W.—to easterly and northeasterly, heaping up the seas across the run of the great stream.

But it is not always bad weather and high seas off the cape. I have sailed a small boat alone down the coast past Hatteras, and nothing happened. I have also weathered a darned hard blow there—but so I have in many other places, too.

All in all, I think very few high-powered steamers get into trouble there which they would escape in mid-Atlantic. If your ship has power to keep off shore, she won't come to any more grief off Hatteras than she will anywhere in the Gulf Stream, or anywhere else where winds blow.

I'm almost sure, with regard to the light, that the lightship has recently been replaced by a fifteen-mile-range lighthouse. It's built at the seaward edge of the shoals—about eighteen miles offshore.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing but reply postage.

Salmon-Fishing in the Northwest

WITH luck and an average-to-good market there's money in it; but it's no life for a Rip van Winkle or a Beau Brummell:

Question:—"Like many others who read *Adventure* and use "Ask Adventure" section I wish to get some ideas about commercial fishing.

First off how much would I have to pay for a gasoline launch, one large enough for living in and for cruising up and down the coast, with the idea of fishing commercially in different localities during different seasons? Also with the idea of having my wife and two-year-old girl along, as a doctor has recommended sea air and sailing for my wife's health. My idea being to travel up to Alaska and down into southern California waters for a couple of years.

My idea has been that a launch 30 to 35 feet in length and 10-foot beam would be sufficient. What do you think? How many people would it require to operate such a boat; or could I do it alone with the help of my wife?

To whom do fishermen sell their catch, and how do they get in touch with the purchasers? Do most of the fishermen work independently, or does one have to hire himself out to a cannery and fish for a company?

Is the fishing industry very remunerative, especially in the way I have attempted to describe? If I could possibly make a living under such conditions I would like to have you fully describe how.

What would be the cost of a complete outfit, lines, seine and initial grub-stake?

Now don't get the idea that I am completely ignorant of the sea, because I am not, having put one year in with the "black gang" and two on deck. Also I can get my position in navigation. But the question is, have I a practical idea and could I make good at it?"—BOYD H. CARR, Cheyenne, Wyo.

Answer, by Mr. B. Brown:—There are something like 1,500 motor-boats of various kinds engaged in the fishing industry of Puget Sound alone, so that you can see the business is at least fairly prosperous or so many would not engage in it. They are devoted almost entirely to the salmon fisheries, the season for which is long, there being five or six different runs of fish, commencing with the Spring and continuing until late in the Fall.

You could probably pick up a boat and equipment for this work for somewhere around $2,000. Bargains can sometimes be had for even less, while a new boat and equipment would cost considerably more.

The fishermen sell their catch direct to the canneries, the price being fixed before the season opens by agreement. The fishermen have a strong organization and are not held up. Sometimes to the contrary, the cannery men complain, as the latter claim to have lost money on the output of the past two seasons.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

SMITH, ALBERT. Formerly corporal in L Co. Signal Corps, P. I., 1914-1915. Would like to hear from him or any one who soldiered with me in L Co. Signal Corps, at Fort McKinley, Manila, P. I.—Address PAUL ROSENBLUM, 65 Vernon Ave., Long Island City, N. Y.

DALY, A. T. Was in Medical Corps at General Hospital, Manila, P. I., 1916. Was associated with me in Philippine Carnival in a show called "Darktown Cabaret." Any information will be appreciated.—Address PAUL ROSENBLUM, 65 Vernon Ave., L. I. City, N. Y.

KANE, MILLER RICHARD. Last seen on the U. S. S. *Seattle.* Would like to hear from you.—Address ex-shipmate, JULIAN H. KOCH, S.S. *Yesoking*, care of C. D. MALLORY & Co., 11 Broadway, N. Y.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

MCCAUL, PETER. Born in Watkins, N. Y., 1864. Last heard of in St. Louis, Mo. Any information will be appreciated.—Address B. J. MCCAUL, 316 Webster St., Waco, Texas.

NEWBERRY, FLOYD J. Last heard from in Winona, Okla., in April, 1919. May be employed in telephone or telegraph construction work: Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—HARRY D. NEWBERRY, 2126½ W. Pico St., Los Angeles, Cal.

CHANDLER, ETHEL M. Aunt. Last known address 3800 Lake Park Ave., Chicago, Ill. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JEAN E. BURKE, 500 Tafel St., Cincinnati, Ohio.

MOORE, HARRY A. Free-lance newspaper reporter. Was in Sioux City, Ia., 1917-1918. Please write your old friend; have some ideas. Address—CHAS. W. FORBES, 171 Fell St., San Francisco, Cal.

HAMILTON, CHARLES. British aviator in late war. Occasionally called "The Grasshopper." Any one who knows him please write to me at once. Have very important news.—Address ROBERT L. ZILLER, 806 Congress Ave., Austin, Texas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BATTERY "B," 2 Btn., French Artillery. Any men of this outfit will learn something to their advantage.—Please write CHARLES J. (MACK) MAGUIRE, North Wales, Pa.

CARR, ISAAC SCOTT. Left home in Manayunk, Phila., Pa., in 1984. Last heard of in St. Louis, Mo. Age about sixty. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write to his daughter.—Address MRS. EVA HICKS, Gen. Del., Taft, Cal.

VAN WYCK, THOMAS McLOUGHLIN. Born in Perth Amboy, N. J. Went to Manila during Spanish-American War, 1898. Served in Medical Corps, U. S. Army. Last heard of in Burma, India. Mac—your old boyhood friend would like to hear from you.—Address CLEVELAND F. DUNDERDALE, Box 237, St. Regis Falls, N.Y.

THOMAS, GEO. WASHINGTON. Age thirty-three five and one-half feet tall; brown skin. Left Palatka Fla., for St. Louis, Mo., in 1913. Received one letter, saying he was sick in hospital. Have not heard from him since. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—Address (Mother) Mrs. THOMAS CERTAIN, 2 Highland Ave., Madison, N. J.

CHAMBLEE, PAT, BARLOW, FRANK. And other friends of Buoy 13, Pensacola, Fla. Would like to hear from you.—Address L. D. BELL, 608 King St., Charleston, S. C.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

RANEY, B. O. Last heard from in Phila. Would like to hear from you.—Address L. D. BELL, 608 King St., Charleston, S. C.

SMITH, CURTIS WILLIAM. Last heard from in Pauline, Iowa. Any one knowing his address please write.—Address ERWIN HIGGINS, P. O. Box 270, South River, N. J.

TAGGART, HELEN ALICE. Last heard of in Rockford, Ill. If you see this notice Helen, please write to your little girl.—Address ALICE COUTANT HIGGINS, P. O. Box 270, South River, N. J.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MILNTHORP, JOHN or HENRY. Last heard from farming on homestead near Battleford, Sask., 1910. Any information concerning the whereabouts of any members of the family will be appreciated.—Address MRS. FRED WILSON MILNTHORP, P. O. Box 1427, Tulsa, Okla.

LARURIE, R. C. Last seen in Wilmington, Del. Any one know his present thereabouts please write.—Address HOWARD L. CLARK, W. 4th St., Marcus Hook, Pa.

DAWSON, WILLIAM J. Am back in Flint. If you see this, write.—Address FRANK MACH, 920½ Hamilton Ave., Flint, Mich.

MILLER, GEORGE M. Machine Gun Co., 111th Inf. Last seen at Camp Dix, N. J., May 4, 1919. Any information concerning him please write L. T., 421, care *Adventure.*

REITH, JAMES. Uncle. Ship carpenter. Native of Aberdeen, Scotland. Last heard of in Cleveland, Ohio, about forty-eight years ago. Any information concerning his whereabouts please write L. T., 422, care of *Adventure.*

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

WHEELER, CHARLES. Would like to hear from you. —Address ex-shipmate, JIM KOCH, 3rd Mate, S.S. *Yesoking*, care of C. D. MALLORY & Co., 11 Broadway, N. Y.

HALSELL, "PUSS." Formerly Lt. in 34th Inf., 7th Div. Left regiment at El Paso, in 1918, and has not been heard from since. May be in the U. S. Navy. Have good news for him. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. T. 423, care of *Adventure*.

THE following have been inquired for in either the First June or Mid-June issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirer from this magazine:

ABBOTS, ALBERT; Adams, Jesse; Allen, Luther B.; Anzini, Henry V.; Baglin, Jack; Berger, Ole Elesasen; Bittel, George; Boyd, Asa; Brieger, Arthur; Brockmeir, Otto H.; Bronk, Henry; Burgess; Burke, Max; Burns, J. M.; Clark, William H.; Coles, Harry A.; Conenen, George; Curts, Frank E. (theatrical name, Frank Manning); Donegan, Joseph T.; Doppman, Frank C.; Dunkleu, Gunner Leslie Hill; Errieson, James; Fairbanks, John Custus; Farrington, I. R.; Field, Wm. H.; Fitzgerald, Garrat; Fox, Albert, Florence, Albertine, Thomas and Alice; Fredet, Peter; Gilbert, Robt. E.; Grady, George S.; Hall, Dr. W.W.; Harmon, Nancy Mabel; Henderson, Jack; James, Frank; Johanson; Kennedy, James A.; King, Clarence; King, Jim; Kotelman, Harry T.; Lake, Archie Lewis; Lawson, Harry or Hammy; McDonald, James; McFarland, Earl; McMullen, Mrs. Grace; McPherson, Kenneth; Miller, Walter Harcourt; Mitchell, Ben; Moses, Reuben; Munkins, Haven; Pendleton, Eugene; Rattray, John; Redding, Earl F.; Ritter, Ralph Herbert; Robbins, Ellsworth H.; Sadusky, Joseph; Sheldon, Mrs. Ella, Fred and Adelbert; Sholea, Sgt. J. J.; Snook, Mrs. Anna E.; Soeding, Harry; Taylor, William W.; Turner, John; Vaughn, Roger D.; Walker, Geo. Francis; Watkins, Robert; Webb, Joseph Ralph; Weldon, Frank; Wendler, William D.; Wheeler, Andrew J.; White, Theodore, Jr.; Whitlocke, J. E.; Wurtha, Charles.

MISCELLANEOUS—A. E. F. men from 310th Machine Gun Bat., Co. B., 79th Div.; A. E. P. or Pat; Boys of Base Hosp. at Nesves, Nievre, France; Canadians, old pals of the 1st Dept. Bat. Manitoba Regiment, Coates, Landrigan, Bumby, Keller, Richards, Kirkpatrick, McGrew, and any others, who survived the Big Show; former members of 657th Aero Sq.; Friends in 37th Co. U. S. Marines, Camaguey, Cuba. 110th Irish Inf. Overseas Bat. Canadian Ex. Force (Ft. Wadsworth, N. Y.) Bat. D., 20th Field Art., U. S. Army; Goodlett, Elmer F.; Speicht, Guy; Maher, Danny; Mischaud; Heavy Frank; Harvey, Geo, or any of the boys of Bat. D. 31st F. A. A. E. F.; nieces and nephews of Fred and Sallie Gibson; relatives of John Burger; relatives of Mrs. Meffond Wintermute; sons and daughters of Joe Hancock.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Allen, Paul; Barrett, Raymond; Beaton, G. M.; Mr. and Mrs. Bennett; Blighton, Frank; Bonner, J. S.; Bromell, Mr.; Buckley, Ray; Butterfield, E.; Carpenter, Robert S.; Carr, John; Casselberry, Lane P.; "Chink"; Chisholm, D. F. K.; Clark, Ernest S.; Clark, Wilfred J.; Cleve, Jim; Clingham, Charles; Coles, Bobby; Connor, A. M.; Cook, Elliott D.; Cook, William N.; Corbett, Fred P.; Curtis, D. A.; Courtlandt, Victor; Craun, Galen E.; Erwin, Phillip; Fisher, 1st. Sgt. R.; Gale, Geo. A.; Gallagher, Owen; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Haskins, S. S.; Hoffman, J. M.; Hooker, Wm. Francis; Howard, Charlie; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Irving, Thos. L.; Jackson, Robert R.; Klug, Chas. C.; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Lander, Harry; Larisey, Jack; Lee, Wm. R., M.D.; Lekki, Michael; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; MacDonald, Tony; McAdams, W. B.; MacKay, D. C.; Mackintosh, D. T. A.; McNair, Henry S.; Mendelson, Aleck; Nelson, Frank Lovell; Noll, Leslie D.; Nylander, Towne J.; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, Dr. M.; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phipps, Corbett C.; Pigeon, A. H.; Posner, Geo. A.; Pulis, H. F.; Raines, Wm. L.; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Roberts, Walter; Rogan, Chas. B.; Rudolph, F.; Rundle, Merrill G.; Ryder, H. S.; St. Claire, Fred; Schmidt, G.; Scott, James F.; Shaw, Albert; Sloan, Charles A.; Smith, C. O.; Starr, Ted; Stocking, C. B.; Strong, Clarence B.; Taylor, C. W.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Weintrauk, H. W.; Wiley, Floyd; Williams, Capt. W. P.; Wood, George; J. C. H.; W. W. T.; S 177284; L. T. 439; Third Officer, S.S. *Lake Elmdale*; WS-XV.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieutenant Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Bennett; Byron Chisholm; A. B. Paradis; E. E. S. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; J. E. Warner; L. E. Patten; L. T. Bennett; Sinn Cardie; James Mosse; C. E. Wilson; R. W. Kimsen; C. H. Huntington; D. Polowe; S. C. Holston; P. Brady; Patrick O'Farrell.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-JULY ISSUE

The complete novel and the complete novelette mentioned on the second page of this number are but two of the ten stories that will appear in the Mid-July issue. Here are the others:

LIEUTENANT SCARTH, THE MAN WHO— *Thomson Burtis*
Fliers and a flood.

LEAD UPON THE WATERS *F. W. Sayers*
Two men and hunger.

THE MATE OF THE *ANDROSINA* *Frederick William Wallace*
Retribution on the high seas.

THE SHOWDOWN An Article *Frederick R. Bechdolt*
In the old West a man proves himself.

MARACAYBO A Tale of the Brethren of the Main *Rafael Sabatini*
Pirates against the Spanish fleet.

BIG TUSKS *F. St. Mars*
Elephants.

THE QUALITY OF HONOR *Lewis H. Kilpatrick*
Eye for an eye in the mountain country.

SORCERY AND EVERHARD A Four-Part Story Part III *Gordon Young*
The trail of the witch woman leads across San Francisco Bay.